

THE ARNOLD
LIP

C. E. LAWRENCE

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THE ARNOLD LIP

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A SORT OF COMEDY

BY C. E. LAWRENCE

AUTHOR OF "PILGRIMAGE," ETC.

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

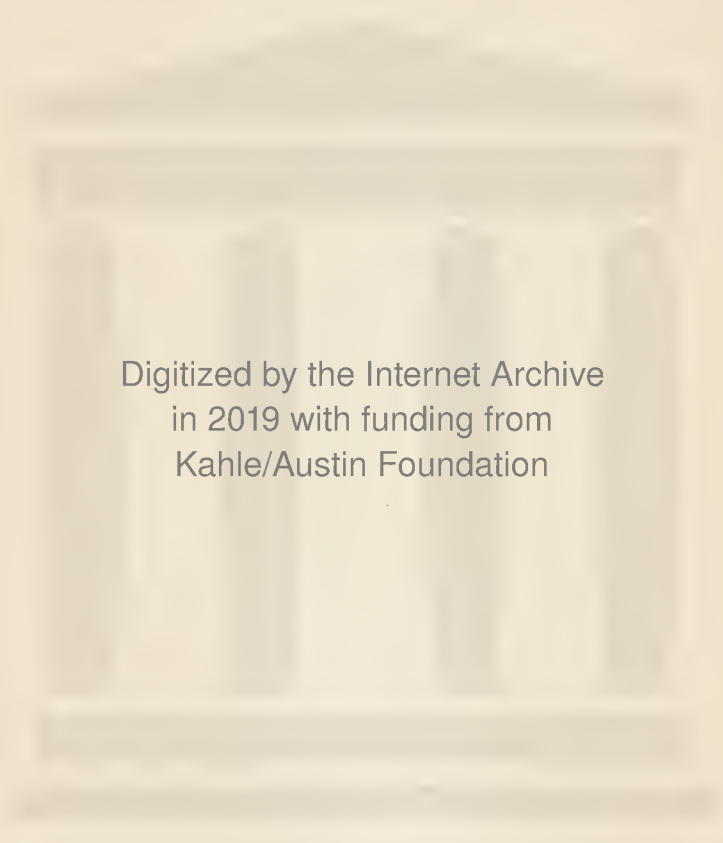
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TO
JAMES MILNE
WHO HAS PROVED HIMSELF A FRIEND
IN DEED

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THE ARNOLD LIP

CHAPTER I

SIR ANTHONY

THE Arnolds were inclined to believe themselves an exceptional Family.

When Sir Anthony, their head and law-giver, looked upon his wife, himself, their children, and the cushioned environment in which they lived, he felt perfectly pleased and content; and was conscious that he—and through him they—deserved the good fortune. He was confident, also, that he knew why it was so deserved. He had been prudent; had chosen his friends well; and had not neglected opportunities. He had taken things with a very proper seriousness; the result being that the Family bread was plentifully buttered, and the Family tea-table a favoured shrine of local society and visiting relatives.

Life, with all his sober appreciation of its reputable gaieties, was to Sir Anthony no butterfly flutter between dawn and dark. It was, indeed, an opportunity to be made the most of. He recognised that many rewards are bestowed on the worthy—wealth, prosperity, social importance, the joys of being looked up to—all good

things, and not to be despised with impunity. He, for one, certainly did not despise them. He was true to his order, as he called it.

For the discontented in life he had a magnificent—it might almost be called a religious—contempt. Want of backbone was a sort of wickedness. Failure he despised. Who would fail who was not weak? The ill-regulated army of the workless worthless was to him anathema—too bad even for bad language, a vice he was never guilty of, though sometimes he looked as if he thought it. Malcontents, public or private agitators, demagogues, anarchists, radicals—oh, bah! They were, to judge from his expressions, lingering creatures of black nightmare; the mouthy residue of a bad age; an unkempt, grasping rabble; *canaille* not to be thought of patiently; fit subjects for an effective lethal chamber; criminals too long at liberty. Extremists he hated as only an extremist can.

If his deeds could have been as bloodthirsty as certain of his frequently declared sentiments, this gentle-hearted, kindly Conservative would have made an efficient executioner, whenever Autocracy discovered the safe end and use of the guillotine. The very thoughts of his *bêtes-noires* to him were blasphemy, their intentions insipient sacrilege. They would trample on the sanctity of property—a phrase he was fond of—and overturn all that made life agreeable to the decently-conditioned and the well-behaved.

When Sir Anthony thought of such earth-shaking impossibilities as the triumph of the

mad, bad mob he became tremendous, and inevitably tended to cause persons in his presence to speak with hushed voices, as if they were gossiping in church or attending the funeral of a rich relative. The subject of the activities of the might-be-dangerous was the red rag to this sterling John Bull.

With all that extravagance in words—it was his only extravagance—Sir Anthony really was a good man, a clean Englishman, a suburban pillar of the state, one of the many who not only talk but do. If he revelled in the *status quo* he was always willing to send a cheque to some recognised society founded to mend the woes of the worthy. He insisted—as most of his fellows are wont to do—on being on the side of the angels. He regularly lent his motor-car to the Conservative candidate at bye-elections in the north and east quarters of Kent, and paid his rates and taxes in a fury, on the day of the demand-notes reaching him.

He looked so truly the picture of the better sort of modern knight, that the wonder is he was not one. “Sir Anthony” was a nickname, so widely and freely used that its wearer had almost come to believe he was born under the accolade. He had grown accustomed to not expecting to see his name in the lists of birthday honours.

He was a finely-built, well-looking, silvery man. His hair and moustache were white and closely trimmed. He was dressed better than merely well. His particular personal weakness

was white waistcoats. There were stories afloat that he was apt to be harsh and unmerciful in his dealings; but they were not true. They were something of the price innocent pomposity must pay, for he could at times be pompous, and always wore an air of weightiness and conscious uprightness. He governed things, ordered people about habitually, and possessed a will which was not so strong as it seemed to be. By profession a stockbroker; his telegraphic address was, "Respectability, London."

Sir Anthony—please remember that it is only a nickname—was an enthusiastic believer in established principles and institutions. "Whatever is, is right," might have been the thought-basis of his philosophy. "Whatever has been long established is at least semi-divine," was pretty well his idea of institutional things. He had endeavoured by example and by precept, oft, very oft, repeated, to instil these ideals and beliefs into the minds of his children; and because their powers of reception were different, had succeeded with them only more or less.

Alice, the eldest daughter, had taken the light fervently. She was her father's child, though not so good-tempered as he. She asserted what he believed, and applied it to the disfavour of others. Hugh, the first-born, was as his Aunt Harriet, the wife of that notable retired officer Major Cromwell Smith, had said, a dark horse who hid his light under a bushel. Of all the five children, Hugh had least of the Arnold lip. The Arnold lip was an hereditary institution of

which they were proud. It was recognised as interesting and peculiar.

But there was time yet. The seed was not all sown, and Sir Anthony hoped for Hugh, hoped earnestly, adding precept unto precept perpetually and line upon line, becoming constantly more confident, not without some real modesty, that if a shining example served, he could and would supply it.

Among the established institutions this blameless and necessary father took personal pride in, the Family itself was properly well placed. It followed immediately after the Throne, the Church, and the Tory party.

Sir Anthony had very fine faith in the Family—not his own family only, but family life in general. And in this, of course, he was exactly right. Family life—the Home—represented the spiritual concentration, the completion of all that human excellence can be ; and, still more wonderful and creditable to him, in his own case, it consisted not merely of his own home circle—the “We are Seven,” as Betty, the literary daughter put it—but of his relatives, and Mrs Arnold’s relatives, even to third, and possibly to fourth, cousins.

That fact, alone, is a testimonial to his qualities. How hard is it for many men to bear even their close relatives becomingly ; and yet Sir Anthony was willing to afford hospitality and an example to third, and possible even to fourth, cousins ! Welladay !

The Family was a Fact within which was

expressed, for him, the best in human life. He did not recognise—more from lack of imagination than through excess of modesty—that his appreciation of his own particular Fact was largely due to himself being its crown and centre ; and, in no small measure, the cause of its glowing brightness. And why not ? He was something of a philosopher ; and, like most of us, rather a pessimistic optimist than an optimistic pessimist.

His thoughts were among the high things as his car climbed Chilston Hill—Chilston is a notable, superior suburb, to the south of London. Thinking, quite benevolently, of the mischief which can be wrought by envious tongues, he was again hunting his favourite bugbear.

He had lunched that morning with a director of the Bank of England, who had assured him that if there were not what he was pleased to call a Conservative Revolution, finance and the City might as well be left to the Germans.

This had resulted in a sounding and even enjoyable discussion on the multitudinous dangers that beset us—revolution, war, irreligion, influenza, disintegration of empire ; and found suitable expression for the pity, the grievous pity, that our Constitution was so loosely strung that it was not possible for the Monarch to keep one Government, recruited from one party, in power for all time. Utopian ; but how nice ! If only that could be, it would stop decadence, prevent the wagging of foolish tongues, the rising of rates, the departure of English capital to foreign shores,

and would smother the voices of the rag-mouthed hucksters of words who were a Tower Hill mischief and a perpetual menace.

Sir Anthony, between the cheese and the coffee, had so warmed to his subject, rising to such flights of rhetoric, sinking to such lurid depths of patriotic fear, that the bank-director hurriedly rose, protested that he had not meant all that Sir Anthony thought he meant; and, talking vaguely of an engagement at a flower-show, went, leaving the conversationalist feeling comfortable and good.

Although hours had passed since lunch and his eloquence, Sir Anthony was still enjoying the aftermath. He beamed. The back of Travers, his chauffeur, was warmed by the light that shone from his master's eyes. If only he had time to become a member of Parliament! Sir Anthony fell into a muse.

Truly, it was necessary that a stand, a protest, an effort of repulsion should be made against the forces which tend to the disintegration and disruption of the established condition of things. How was that to be done? By positive effort, yes; organised by those who knew, and those who cared; helped by the negative means of strengthening the social fabric through an enlightened Family Life. If only the Smiths would stand together, and the Browns, and the Macintyres, and the O'Donnells, and the Joneses! Recreate the Clans! Rouse new pride in the Family Name! Up all of us and rally in company with our namesakes! Then what union

there might be! Such was something of the visions of this white-waistcoated dreamer!

We must build living bulwarks round the Things that Be.

Family life! The Family! He was mouthing these thoughts in an unspoken, great-minded soliloquy as he descended from the car, and passed through the house to the lawn beyond. His mind was full of a large benevolence as he contemplated the Family—his Family—they with the Arnold lip.

It was a full half-minute before he was detected, as, from his point of vantage on the verandah under the library window, he watched the groups.

His wife, pale, white-haired, and well-preserved, was sitting, a placid shadow, in an armchair, doing broidery. Alice, his eldest daughter and favourite child, was talking in an engaging manner with her sister Betty, whose appearance of careful untidiness possibly announced with sufficient distinctness that she aspired to be literary. Their conversation was evidently earnest; Sir Anthony was pleased to see it: he could not know they were quarrelling, as often these sisters were.

Hugh was playing a desperate game of croquet with Tom and Millicent, the youngest children. Hugh, the "dark horse" of the Family, was certainly an uncertain quantity. He was destined for the Bar. Cleverer parents than Mr and Mrs Arnold might have had hopes of Hugh; in truth, they had little conception of his powers or of the

strength of his individuality. The system of his education had been well meant rather than wise. He had taken things easily at an expensive day-school, and had afterwards received the attentions of a tutor whose scholarship was inquiring rather than exact. Hugh had a manifold smattering of several 'ologies, with no real knowledge of any of them. Some day this opening of interests might be profitable; but at present it seemed only to hamper him. He liked dabbling, and played with work; but always was recognised as the dark horse who might surprise them.

His face was expressive. It had angles and eyebrows—those were its characteristics. The features were ordinary; but when he laughed, or frowned, or was angry—and angry he could be; brutality to animals made him furious—his eyes confirmed his emotions with a blaze. Turned twenty-five, and more ambitious and indolent than he confessed even to himself, he was a young man with moments. He had his faults. As for his qualities, he did his hair carefully, was as clean as soap and a healthy mind could make him, and preferred cricket to golf. That was Hugh.

Tom and Millicent were young enough to be round, vain, blessed with ample appetites, and—gift of the gods!—good powers of digestion. They were both, at present, hobbledehoy of mind, but were determinately elegant in their clothing. They went to expensive schools in the neighbourhood, and were dunces; the one thing they knew thoroughly was that they

belonged to the super-folk. Had they lived ten miles farther from London they would, for super-folk, have said the County.

Mr Arnold was so touched at the sight of his assembled family—it meant to him so much—that his eyes became dim. He cleared his throat and so discovered himself.

His wife rose to greet him: it was as if a shadow went to meet its substance—she was that sort of wife. The others took no particular notice of the returned father. They passed to him some sort of casual greeting, and continued playing or quarrelling happily enough, making to the fond eyes of their parents a pleasant picture of domestic peace.

He went down the steps and crossed the lawn. His tread was that of an owner of property. He called to his daughters. They darted at each other a final look of antagonism and came smiling towards him. They were model girls; they knew what membership in such a family implied. Alice especially cherished the ideals of her father.

As she—a really pretty girl: olive, fair, and blue-eyed; who knew how to choose and wear her clothes—followed her sister, she secretly lamented with joy the fact of Betty's untidiness. Such a pity! If only she dressed with taste, if only she did her hair thrice a day, if only—ah, father, there you are, and here are we!

CHAPTER II

THE FAMILY

ANTHONY ARNOLD was sufficiently sophisticated—or unsophisticated, if so it please you—to be able, without self-consciousness, to make a good picture of himself. It was less pose than artistic instinct, of which, for a business man, he had not a small store.

He seated himself in a cane chair, under the gracious shadows of a walnut tree, and took a letter from his pocket. The very chair-cushions seemed to share his importance.

The Family gathered round.

“Here’s news for you,” he said. “Your Aunt Maria—your Aunt Maria cannot come after all.”

He spoke the words solemnly, as if he were reading some state pronunciamiento.

Unanimously, as with one breath, the Family breathed a sigh of unmistakable relief; and then, as with one voice, Betty and their mother said, “Well, there!” and “What a pity!”

“Does she give any reason?” Hugh asked. Being a law-student, he was entitled to make inquiries.

"No, not a word; but your cousin Elizabeth is coming instead—to stay for a good long time, she promises."

For the moment, no comment whatever succeeded this announcement: there was certainly no sigh of relief. The sisters looked at one another with meaning eyes. The silence of the Family was significant.

"Elizabeth will be very useful," said Mrs Arnold, as soon as the quietude had proved itself eloquent. The principal life-mission of this gentle lady seemed to be to extenuate circumstances, to excuse, explain, and find apologies, for other people. Once, in momentary blindness of mind, after a fireside harangue of her husband's against Socialists, she had mildly averred that "they meant well," and so unloosed another deluge.

Tom and Millicent, having no further concern with their father's news—an earthquake would hardly have shaken their plump calm—drifted back to the croquet, and soon were wrangling over the niceties of a hoop.

"Cousin Elizabeth's coming is a bore. Such a bore!" Betty declared vehemently. "She is a nuisance."

"Child!" exclaimed her father, "She is one of the Family."

"It's all very well, father!" cried Alice, "that's the only good that can be said for her."

"She is self-satisfied and inquisitive. She still uses curl-papers. Her figure is the shape

of an empty sack. Oh, father! really, I cannot stand her!"

"Mr Truby, after he had first met Cousin Elizabeth, said she reminded him of a piece of string," Alice declared with scornful voice.

"That's very rude of Truby," said Sir Anthony, ruffling. He had some of the characteristics of Chanticleer. He eyed severely the young evidence of a plantain which, like a green blot, marred the smooth surface of the lawn.

"And Mr Manners," eagerly chimed in Betty, encouraged by her sister's boldness, and not a whit frightened by her father's protest, "Mr Manners said she reminded him of a plainly-embroidered hassock too much knelt on. It really is a great nuisance her coming. I don't care——!"

"Silence!" commanded their father sternly. "I really am ashamed of both of you. Those young men are ill-natured cockscombs if that is their judgment on a feminine fellow-creature. I shouldn't have thought they'd wits enough for it: it looks suspicious! Are these, can these be, our daughters, mother?" He shook a weighty head and settled the folds of his waistcoat. "Children, Cousin Elizabeth is my relative, your relative. She belongs to the Family, to us. Never," he declared, almost visibly swelling, "never shall it be said that the doors of the Dene were shut to one of the Family—who is worthy," was added as an afterthought, which proved, as events turned

out, almost prophetic. As he said the words, he was again very like Chanticleer. "She is to be made welcome!" He thumped the back of a garden chair with an oratorical fist. That was the ultimatum. His audience was impressed.

"The girls will make her very, very welcome; won't you, darlings?" asked their mother.

"We will," said Betty. "Elizabeth has her good points. We've seen her elbows, haven't we, Alice?"

Both of them sniggered.

"They must," said Sir Anthony, without condescending to notice Betty's remark. "Aunt Maria is fond of Cousin Elizabeth, is therefore kind to spare her to us for a season, ah!—but there is the dressing-bell! Off you go, girls, and don't be late! Unpunctuality at the dinner-table is as reprehensible as—as—unpunctuality at church, because—ah——!"

"Dinner being more attractive, there is less excuse for lateness," Hugh interposed, with a laugh, as he ran and sprang up the verandah steps.

"Beast! beast!" Alice called after him. "Come, Betty," she added, "you won't have too much time if you're going to get tidy."

Betty scorned to answer.

Sir Anthony, in his admiration for the amenities of family life, saw only the humour of these little interludes, though they were played just under his tolerant nose. The mother was more observant.

"Off you go," said he genially; and the Family

went indoors, Tom and Millicent dropping their mallets on the lawn just where they happened to be, and making a heavy race for the verandah.

They dined at seven. Almost invariably the postman's summons disturbed the third course. So it was, once again, on this occasion.

It was part of the ritual, whenever the Family was alone, for the letters to be brought in and given to Sir Anthony, who sorted and distributed them the moment the dessert and decanters were placed on the table. Until then, the impatience of the others had to be held in check, though Alice, who sat at the right of her father, and was nearest the pile, was generally able to see the envelopes. In this sort of cleverness she was sufficiently capable.

She noticed on this occasion that, as her father, while waiting, amused himself by looking the letters through and studying the postmarks, he paid particular and recurring attention to one of them. It stirred her curiosity as evidently it had stirred his. She was soon to be satisfied.

The moment the first nut was cracked by Tom—he and Millicent, table sportsmen, were generally neck and neck in that event—Sir Anthony distributed the correspondence. Then, at once, he took the letter that had piqued his curiosity.

He opened it with a fruit knife and began to read—said, "Well, well!" and donned pince-nez. That was a sign of extra interest, possibly of disturbance. The Family, forgetting their private interests, watched him.

"Listen to this," he said. "It never rains but it pours."

"Not bad news of Aunt Maria?" asked the mother with genuine anxiety.

"No, worse luck!" her husband nearly said. Even his tongue could be almost irresponsible sometimes. "I will read it."

He settled his pince-nez, and moved a silver candlestick nearer to him.

"'Dear Tony.' It's from Tom Secretan, my dear, you remember him. 'Dear Tony,—It is many years since you have heard from me, and now I write, for old sake's sake, to ask you to do me a kindness. I will come to the point at once. My wife—whom you never saw; she died last year, as probably you know—had an only daughter by her first marriage, Cecily Armstrong. Cecily has been a true, good daughter to her stepfather; no child of mine could have been more kind. If she had her way, she would stay with me in this dead-and-alive village (I sometimes doubt the justice of the alive) till the end of the chapter; but that would not be fair to her, and I want her, if some friend—you for choice, Tony—will help, to see something more of the world than is possible here——'"

"Where is 'here'?" Alice interrupted.

"Oh, Grangeton Vicarage in Lincolnshire," was snapped in answer—" 'than is possible here.' Where was I? 'Will you, as a great kindness to a distant relative and a very old friend, make Cecily your guest for a week or two, or three? She badly needs a holiday, however brief. I

cannot have one myself. I am tied here with that tightness of bonds which only an incumbent of a small and isolated country parish can know; but, Providence be thanked, I have no need to complain. I am, as Goldsmith said, passing rich, which is infinitely better than being passing poor; and ends, however distant, always do manage to meet in this accommodating world.

“‘I am asking a favour of you. Will you think of this request of an old playmate?’ (Alice sniffed audibly.) ‘If you are able to grant it and come to know Cecily, you will, I am certain, have reason to be glad. Stepfathers and stepmothers, according to the fairy-tales, are not notoriously sympathetic persons, so that you may take it that my true praise of her is no affectation. I have told her nothing of this, so that she will not be disappointed if you must say, No.

“‘I hope Mrs Arnold is well, and the children. I remember Hugo, and little Alice, what a tyrant she was!’ (All laughed at this, except Alice.) ‘The others, I have not had the pleasure of meeting, and suppose now I never shall. I am not so young as I used to be: nor are you, I daresay. I often think of the old times. Do you remember the Surbiton garden; and that orchard—Farmer Plumtree’s, we called it—where there were temptations, forbidden fruit, broken glass on the wall, and your trousers——!’”

Mr Arnold stared at the paper and broke off the reading suddenly: the inartistic abruptness of the conclusion caused Tom to titter, but a glance from his mother counselled prudence.

The paternal importance was one of the institutions to be cherished. It was impossible to think of Sir Anthony with trousers torn, tampering with the sanctity of property. There was a child-photograph of him, standing in baggy knickerbockers, his hair brushed flat, with books on a table by his side. That was the cherished picture of Mr Arnold's boyhood. Forbidden fruit and Plumtree's orchard—not to mention garments torn—were not to be in the Family picture.

"Tom Secretan!" said Mrs Arnold, in a non-committal tone. It was her diplomatic contribution to the discussion: it would mean whatever her husband might wish it to mean.

"Yes; it's somewhat inconsiderate of old Tom, but I'm glad to hear from him. These country clergy, though, they get spoiled. They have the excuse of poverty and generous neighbours. They are so used to getting what they ask for! When it isn't alms it is oblations. Still I suppose we must do as he wants."

"Must we, father?" said Alice. "Already we have Cousin Elizabeth coming, and we have so many visitors always dropping in."

"Can't she wait until Cousin Elizabeth has gone?" This was Betty's question. "These people interfere with Work such a lot."

It is time to explain that the Work referred to was a novel Betty had begun. It was serious, and, by its author and her sisters, supposed to throw lustre on love. Mrs Grundy and Sappho might equally have been indifferent about it; it would have displeased neither. It was a study

of human perfections, destined to be mated after ten brief chapters of well-conditioned unhappiness. The hero was brown-eyed. The heroine had a "flower-face." He was a belted earl: she a shop-girl, until discovered to be the stolen daughter of a millionaire.

Hugh intervened. Mischievousness lurked by his lips.

"This is hardly worthy of—the Family," he said.

His father, with fine innocence, heartily agreed with him.

"Mr Secretan," Hugh continued, "whom I don't at all remember, though evidently he knew Alice well, is, I gather, a sort of cousin."

"He is my cousin," Sir Anthony agreed.

With much detail of aunts and uncles, grandparents and family furniture, he proved the point to his own satisfaction.

"That being so," said Hugh, in the manner of counsel who has definitely settled a disputed connecting link in his argument, "he is one of the Family—on whom the doors of the Dene shall never be shut."

There was, perhaps, a touch of satire in his voice; perhaps, too faithful an echo of Sir Anthony's tones. His father glanced at him shrewdly. Hugh's face was grave and innocent.

"But it is not he who is coming," Betty protested. "It's her—she, I mean."

Betty was bound to be a stickler for grammatical exactitude, otherwise how could she treat of love in purchasable prose? "Cecily is his daughter-in-law."

"Stepdaughter," Alice corrected coldly. "She is certainly no relative. She has no claims on the Dene. There are no Armstrongs in the Family."

"None the less, we must make her welcome," their father heartily declared. "Hugh is right; the doors of the Dene cannot and shall not be shut on her."

There was a pause of moments. Anthony thought, with reason, that his was, as usual, to be the last word. He was pouring out for himself a glass of port before starting on some new topic of general domestic interest, when Alice resumed the fray.

"I shall not call her by her Christian name," she declared. "She will have to call me Miss Arnold." Betty—though spoiled, she was not an ill-natured girl—was about to echo faintly her sister's inhospitable sentiments, when their mother once more interposed.

"Darlings! darlings!"

"I agree with you, mother," said Sir Anthony. "It—it is not worthy of the Family to falter over welcoming—over doing kindness to Tom Secretan. Alice—I am—and you!" He shook his head in incomprehensible sageness. "She, Cecily—we must call her so if she is—ah, young; Cecily is his stepdaughter. What do we care for the niceties of domestic relationship? I say again that these doors shall never be shut to any member of the Family or—yes—the protégé of one, so long—so long as he or she is worthy. I hope that is clear, plain, and flat. There must be

no doubt on the point. Please remember, all. It is a matter of principle, of most important principle! When we think—dear me!—of the way in which England is threatened by enemies who would strike at her greatness by disparaging Family Life, by unsettling the foundations of Home; when unwashed, horrid rascals tell brazen inexactitudes about the circumstances of the—ah—social organism; when—well, Alice, Hugh, all of you, we must knit the fabric closer, in home, country, and empire; we must knit the fabric closer, I say.”

He raised his glass of port, looked with appreciation at its clearness and colour, and drank with expressive satisfaction.

They rose then and moved to the drawing-room—a museum of costly knickknacks and almost oppressive upholstery—for coffee and the Family hour, when the tittle-tattle of the day’s doings was to be agreeably exchanged.

Alice went to the piano and played Rubenstein, with her thoughts on Mr Truby. She wondered whether Cecily would be pretty.

“When shall the child come to us?” asked Mrs Arnold, who was really hospitable and generous.

“When you please, my dear. It is for you to choose. Shall we say in a month’s time? That should do for Tom Secretan. Putting it off till then won’t seem unkind, and perhaps Elizabeth will have departed meanwhile.”

“Not she,” said Alice, beginning Beethoven’s Funeral March, *pianissimo*.

The night was so delicious that Hugh Arnold wandered into the garden to smoke a cigarette. His thoughts were busily at work on a project. He was a young man with ambitions. After long dreaming and some indolence he was drifting to decisions.

The world was his oyster which he with wit would open. He knew the passage, knew how he had amended it; could not, for the life of him, say whether it was Shakespeare's or Walter Scott's. It was enough that he felt pleased at the idea. "Which I with wit will open," he repeated aloud. His mood then was modified. "So little done: so much to do." Again he quoted a modern master. He thought of the greatness of the need, the shortness of human life, and sighed heavily.

CHAPTER III

THE PRIG

HUGH was really ambitious. He was restless. He wanted to live and to do. He panted to be a worker in the arena of public business. He planned to fulfil an intention. The idea had been evolving for months. His fitful readings, his apparent idleness and restlessness, were all concerned with one main project, which had almost come to ripeness and fruition.

He was profoundly dissatisfied with most things; especially with himself. He was thoroughly out of content with the velvet ease of the life he had to live. His father covered him with eiderdown; and he kicked against the cushions. His mother acted sympathetically whenever she acted, so that he longed for real discomfort. He was filled with discontent—not divine discontent, but discontent not discreditable. Hugh was a young man, vaguely yearning to be a martyr, and comforted with the knowledge that a martyr has the reward of a window immortality.

It was certainly not a case of selfish restlessness. In truth, it was something of the same

natural instinct, to find an outlet for energy and self-expression as has taken British settlers to every part of the habitable globe—out of the prairie, the passes, and the bush, to make new Britains.

Hugh was by compulsion a home-keeping youth, whose wits would not keep homely. He wanted that great discipline of responsibility which alone can make effective men. That was the thing. He remembered the great words said by Cecil Rhodes, dying—"So much to do!"

The first need was to find harsher, more suitable environment for himself. That comfortable home was death to his possibilities, as were his muddling methods of fitful reading. He wanted to work, to know what it meant to eat the bread his own labour had earned, to realise the non-necessity of luxuries and the privilege of hunger. In his imagination—for his day-dreams could be vivid—he saw himself a russet-clad settler in some far-away colony, or a navy standing at rest with hammer in hand, or the leader of a Cause fighting for, finding, victory. In all his vision-pictures he was clean-shaven and clean, and assuredly picturesque. He was no idle *poseur*. He meant to do high things highly; he was really sincere. He meant to help something or somebody, somehow. And would do it. Yes! His individuality craved for the opportunity to know itself through the ordeals of the striving world. He would suffer, struggle, win—as soon as his father would allow him. He still was a dutiful youth.

He had been groping after vague desires for a long, indefinable time. The reality of his purposes had come to him with added clearness, day by day. Now they were insistent. They called. At no moment before had he been so conscious of the strength of the demand of his manhood, but he was in many minds as to the direction it was to take.

He wandered from the garden through the lanes without, and on to the hills, where he sat on a stile and watched the glow of distant London. The heavens were spangled with starlight. He crouched beneath an inspiring canopy of wonder; wrestled with thoughts, ideas, aspirations, ambitions, hopes; and facing the facts, incidentally told himself uncomplimentary truths.

He saw himself rather small.

His father and mother had been kindness itself to him. There could be no question of their superlative gentleness and constant consideration to their children. Sir Anthony, despite his brusquerie, Mrs Arnold, in spite of her self-shadowing instincts, had given all they could to Hugh, his three sisters, and brother. They had bought for them every advantage, as the wordling puts it; and had sheltered them effectually from the harshness and the ugliness of life. Pretty well every healthful desire and wish that children could have had been more or less gratified, almost before it could be realised. There was no shade of a question of the parental goodness. Without doting or adoring

they had tended to spoil. The Family, to Sir Anthony and his wife, was a Fact to be coddled.

Hugh was not the favourite, even with his mother, who, silently observant always, was perhaps a little respectful of the light-hearted sarcasms and flippancies which came too readily to his lips; but in his life Hugh realised it now—he had never known real cause for complaint; and that—that—was exactly the cause of his complaining.

As he saw these truths, while sitting on the stile—stool of repentance and clear vision—he felt indescribably poor and mean and selfish.

He called himself in severe sincerity a pig, a prig, and a parasite.

Self-examination of that sort wears diminishing spectacles. Hugh's satisfaction rapidly dwindled as he critically regarded himself. He was truthful, with exaggeration, on the subject of himself. Indolent, ineffective, useless; and again he said it—ugh!—a parasite. He lived idly and enjoyed while his father worked. He repeated the word because it was to him so horrid. Parasite! Compactly it expressed a severe judgment; but, with a relentless joy of self-torture, he knew and told himself it was just.

Poor prig! The stars can dominate the moods and the littleness of man.

It was then that Hugh's social-consciousness—to give it its long name—struggled for the first time into being. What had he done for Society in return for enjoyment? Looking at

the world as it was, iron and pitiless to so many, why should a multitude of men and women labour to provide him with good things, when he made no answering effort, and had barely thought a thank-you? What had he done to deserve the blessings with which he had been endowed? There was no shrinking from the one answer.

A farm-labourer, bent through the toil of the fields, came to and heavily clambered over the stile, and as he passed him by gave him "good-evening."

Hugh, as he answered the decent greeting, envied the man his independence. There, in his corduroy-grime, was one not a parasite. He, independent in his poor sufficiency, lived on no-one's bounty; he wrought, earned, built, planted, paid his way. The soil was cleaner for his usefulness, and the fruits of the earth richer and more plentiful. Hugh, keen to the humiliation of the truth, clenched a fist passionately and beat his knee for shame. What use was he? What use? He was eager to win for himself, to work, to do, to eat the sweet food his own efforts had brought him. Why should he not do so? The ultimate question was answered with decision. He must and he would!

A light wind played on his forehead and soothed him, nerved him. He formed new, vague, numerous plans of endeavour. He would break through the silken shackles that bound him; but how to do so without seeming ungrateful and causing pain to his parents? Ah, that

was the difficulty! The rub was there with a vengeance.

To a spoilt child, of all people, it is doubly hard to keep the fifth commandment. Hugh was, however, decent enough to know that to go abruptly from the grooves his father and mother had made for him would cause them anxiety and dismay. It had to be done—that was flat—if he were to cease to be parasitical; but how?

He leapt from the stile and walked homewards rapidly. His intentions were clearer, but the means of giving effect to them were still an uncertain tangle. Facing facts, he realised his limitations. He must learn more about life; what it meant to himself and his fellows; how he was to achieve his niche of usefulness; what steps he should take to break with the present.

Hugh was, in the minutes of that homeward march, a rather finer fellow than he had hitherto been. The pettiness and meanness, the indolence and sluggishness of sympathy, which in a measure had been his inevitable accompaniments, began to grow thin, and in some respects wear away; and though in his severe self-judgment he may have been somewhat unjust, he had not been entirely so.

He paused by the side-gate of the Dene to look once more at the stars, and was brought face to face with the verities. He saw humbling actualities; himself, Man in his true proportion and relation to the universe. He remembered the plaint of Ecclesiastes.

He turned anew from the lighted house, where-

in he could hear Alice playing light operatic flippancies, and moved to a garden-seat. The excitement—not without enjoyment—of self-criticism was still upon him. He hid his face in his hands; did his best to know personal humility. He plumbed greater depths than he had yet done.

What a little foolish thing was man and his majesty, in the face of the stars and the centuries! The Pharaohs had fought against God, had looked for eternal glory on earth, had won conquests over nations, had built their monuments and pyramids, hoping to set their seal on the forehead of existence. All that effort of determination with effusion of blood and many noises—while these very same stars were burning! And now! What were the Pharaohs, but rifled bones in sepulchres, names for spademen and philosophers to play with? Such was the fate of the world-subduing, God-daring, monarchs of Egypt. What would be his fate, and the fate of his fellows? Merely the casual disappearance of a butterfly. That was the kind of thought to take polish from a young man's vanity. He thought it now, while Alice teased his serious ears with Offenbach.

He must work, he must serve, he must do. Only so could he use worthily his brief opportunity for activity between the eternal future and the infinite past.

In some such manner as this, in a fumbling and confused fashion, though with gradual gain of definition, after the gropings and the

cogitations of months, Hugh crept towards decision.

He rose and entered the house, springing up the verandah steps with lightness and vigour, to be welcomed with a chorus of inquiry.

Betty picked an elm-leaf from the sleeve of his dinner-jacket. She noticed the dark light of his eyes, the result of intellectual excitement.

"You've been serenading someone," she said.

Sir Anthony boomed a laugh. Apt to be sentimental himself, he often believed he found romance amusing. He suddenly checked his hilarity.

"That doesn't sound like Hugh. He's far too much of a lawyer to address his vows to any *Dulcinea*. I believe Hugh won't marry until he's Lord Chancellor. Eh?"

Hugh protested clumsily against his sister's suggestion and the implied compliment—it was intended for a compliment—of his father. He was still a cousin of the starshine, and up in the clouds, away.

"Besides," said Alice, who stopped playing in order to give more way to her shaft, "Vi Bellenden's abroad."

"Violet Bellenden?" echoed Sir Anthony. He looked at Hugh with a pleased smile. There was benediction in his glance. The Bellenden's belonged to what was locally called "the highest circles of Chilston society." They were familiar with none but the local select. Old Mr Bellenden could only be described as a gentleman, for he did nothing, and had done nothing since he

married his wife, except potter about his little estate, practise putting on the lawn, talk about dogs, and exchange calls with the well-to-do. Mrs Bellenden had been the younger daughter of a baronet, whose very penury had seemed even to accentuate his pride. She had an aquiline nose and a spine.

Violet, their only child, a charming and talented girl, would make a very desirable wife—an elegant *parti*—Sir Anthony thought. The idea delighted him. He looked on his son with approval, and knew it was worth while being the parent of such a Family. Good children, good children! he thought.

“You mustn’t bracket my name with Miss Bellenden’s,” said Hugh, shortly.

“Of course not,” mocked Alice, “not yet!”

“Or at any time.” He spoke still more sharply. This was getting past a joke.

“Quite right, Hugh,” his father declared, while Betty murmured something about sense of humour. “It is in the highest degree reprehensible and improper—though improper is perhaps not quite the word—to do anything of the kind. Any such—ah—premature association of names would be extremely distasteful, distasteful. Moreover, before Hugh thinks of marriage, he must work at his profession and make his name, establishing the beginnings of what I hope will prove fortune and fame. I trust Hugh won’t marry until he is in Parliament, the Conservative member for—somewhere. Then if Miss Bellenden——!”

Sir Anthony, in his usual, frequent manner paused significantly. He was, in his little way, a master of aposiopesis. There was a proud, massive smile about his lips. Alice played softly the opening bars of Mendelssohn's Wedding March.

"Pom! pom!" hummed Anthony.

Hugh frowned. He was keen-witted enough to read the thoughts underlying his father's words and satisfaction; but suppressed his annoyance. He was still under the influence of the state of exaltation that had come to him in Puck's country out on the hill. He thought this might be a fit opportunity to speak of his ambitions.

"Thanks, father; I hope to please you. I have recently been thinking a great deal of the future. I see how important it is. I have been wasting time. I have been a bit of a prig and an ass."

"No, no!" said one of the girls, ironically.

"As for fortune and fame," he went on, "I don't know that they sound very attractive. I don't think they matter much after all."

"What's that?" said his father, sharply.

"I want to have a talk with you and mother one day soon, if you will let me. I needn't bother you now. I've been thinking a good deal of the future and life. I've wasted enough time. It's pretty serious."

"It is, my boy, it is! I'm glad you take it so. That's the spirit—ah—to approach the responsibilities. If other youths and young people were as wise, and looked ahead while still they were

young, we should have less nonsense talked and less trouble in the world; shouldn't we, mother?"

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs Arnold.

"I sometimes think when I read the ravings of the agitators, when I—how my blood boils when I think of them!" he switched himself off the red trail. "But fame and fortune, Hugh, you must not despise them. Both are worth having, worth winning, otherwise who would be statesmen, soldiers, explorers, business-men? Eh? It is only the failures, my boy, who profess to despise fortune and fame. Their contempt is—ah—only an aspect of envy. There would be no progress without property. Hence the sanctity of that which is. I am proud to be the father, the chief of a Conservative Family. Yes! Now, if Miss Bellenden even——"

Again he paused, leaving the conclusion to the imagination of his audience. His practical face took on an expression of dreaminess.

"Milly will be an awkward age for a bridesmaid," Betty remarked with mischievous intention, "just between child and flapper."

"Oh, stop that!" cried Hugh, his nerves in a pinch.

"Flapper yourself!" said Millicent, her fat cheeks shining with red indignation.

"I'm past it, dear," was the ingratiating answer, "you are still two years away from it."

"No more about Miss Bellenden and Hugh," commanded the father, in his finality voice. "This is not at present a subject even for dis-

cussion within the circle of the Family. But the idea is creditable, creditable. I am sure our Aunt Maria would approve."

"I fully intend to be a bridesmaid if I'm not already married," Millicent asserted brazenly; and with laughter the episode ended.

Alice, who had accompanied the discussion with soft music and an air of superior detachment, yawned, moved from the piano, and lounged on a sofa. As she passed, she brushed the illustrated paper Betty happened to be opening.

"Clumsy!" said that young lady, energetically. Alice affected to ignore the rudeness. She touched her own smooth locks significantly. It was an effective answer.

Mrs Arnold noticed the passages, as, in her quiet way, she saw most things; but, as usual, she said nothing. Her function in life was to avoid the disclosure of the disagreeable. She was always the passive peacemaker. Sir Anthony did not see it. He was deaf to domestic discords. He would not, could not, see what should never be there—differences within the Family.

He sat comfortably in his chair, lighted a second cigar, and as he smoked, dreamt dreams of social successes. He saw himself prosperous influential, oratorical, picturesque; and during that period of contemplative bliss, forgot entirely the many things, real and imaginary, that he dreaded, despised, and detested. His faithful bugbears, for the time being, ceased to roar. The nightmare slept in its stable. He wandered

through a world of delicious reverie, a haven post-prandial, and saw himself—himself was necessarily prominent—breathing nuptial blessings over Hugh and the fortunate Violet, while old Mr Bellenden, in his short-breathed, trumpeting manner, praised his wedding-speech.

Sir Anthony went to bed that night in a very happy temper. Hugh was a good boy, a good boy. They, the Family, the world, would have cause to be proud of him. The predictions of twenty years earlier, when Hugh was precocious and five, were evidently preparing to perch.

That night Hugh slept not at all. His mind was on the watch, highly alert. He tossed and turned; saw triumphs ahead. Multitudinous projects, ambitions, all haunted him. So far as tumultuous excitement permitted him, he weighed ends and means, shaped plans, wondered how to realise his individuality, how to gain essential liberty of action, without giving pain to his father and mother. He shrunk, as he should have done, from hurting them.

The prig militant was over-weighted with conscience: a serious handicap in such a condition.

CHAPTER IV

VISITORS

THE Family generally forgot about Cousin Elizabeth's unacceptable visit, until the day before her arrival, when Mrs Arnold reminded Sir Anthony that a fly must be ordered to fetch their guest from the railway-station. Neither Elizabeth nor that power in the background, Aunt Maria, approved of motor-cars.

"They were especially invented to worry," Aunt Maria had said, with an upward motion of mittened hands, when she heard that Sir Anthony had bought one. "They snort and they smell, and are a sad invitation to the terrible profanity of bad men."

This expression of opinion, duly wafted to the ears of the Family, as were all utterances from that inspired quarter, caused Anthony Arnold actual, even painful, disquiet, until the joys of ownership, the airs of Travers the new chauffeur, and the blessed effects of smooth and rapid motion, had caused him to forget. The dicta of Aunt Maria were always right; but their impression was apt to become blurred and faded. It was, however, quite impossible for Aunt Maria's

aide-de-camp, Cousin Elizabeth, to be met by the mechanical monster; so a fly was duly arranged for.

At the appointed time she came.

She came, she saw; and she did not conquer. Such was not Elizabeth's way. She was meek.

A little grey creature, like a tidy mouse, she came in slowly. Her small brown eyes twinkled. She wore an oppressed look, was evidently shy, and yet eager to be welcome. Her clothes, not fashionably cut, had an appearance of lay-deaconess about them. Elizabeth always meant well.

One only of the Family, Mrs Arnold, was genuinely glad to see her, and she did not show it. That good creature welcomed everybody. She was of the sort who would treat a genius and a mountebank in precisely the same weakly-kindly, honestly appreciative manner; and, probably, even if they talked for a twelvemonth, would have seen no difference between the mountebank and the genius. They would both have been so clever.

"Dear Cousin Catherine!" Elizabeth said to Mrs Arnold, as she kissed her nervously in the neighbourhood of the left nostril. "Dear Cousin Betty! Dear Cousin Alice!" She gave each of the sisters a touch of un-kissing lips and a dew-cold nose, tasting of disapproval. "Dear Cousin Hugh!" Him she shook by the hand, or rather lent him limp fingers which he waggled and threw down. "Thomas, it is! Millicent, child! Oh, thank you, Catherine. I'm sure I'm going to

be a trouble to you, I fear I must be! It's so nice to see you all again." The brown eyes opened and shut rapidly. She breathed heavily, excitedly. "It was so kind of you, cousin, to send the fly to meet me; but the man whipped the horse frightfully coming up the hill. I could feel its pain. I tapped at the window behind him hard with my umbrella; but he did not notice me. It made me miss the count in my knitting. Aunt Maria would have made the creature stop, but I couldn't. Such a low-looking person. A wife-beater, I'm afraid! And, of course, he must drink! There are wretches in the world." She stopped short suddenly, appalled at finding herself talking. "Please do not trouble, dear cousin," she continued, "I'll find the way. I'm sure I know the room. Really I do not wish to trouble you. I'm afraid I'm going to be such a nuisance. You are indeed kind, dear Cousin Catherine. How Thomas has grown!"

When the guest had gone to her room—she would not part with wrapper or handbag, but clung to each with apologies, protests, entreaties, and limpet hands—Alice turned to her father and exclaimed,

"Her kisses, horrid!"

"My dear!" said he, shocked, "we must be tolerant and hospitable. Elizabeth is a very good soul. She means well, she means kindly. The world is—ah—richer for her sympathy. Remember, she lives with Aunt Maria. No light privilege, my child!" He paced slowly

down the room and contemplated the clustered china in a cabinet.

"The thing is to keep her doing things," said Betty. "She likes pottering around tablecloths and workbaskets, making bibs for the niggers, and is nervous of croquet-balls. So while she stays, I go in for the open-air cure and practise for the croquet tournament. *Mens sana*, and so on, you know the Latin quotation. But it gets in the way of Work."

"Come, Betty, this isn't playing the game," said Hugh, who sprawled in a heavy armchair and looked severely at a copy of *Punch*. "I'm not, I confess, fond of Cousin Elizabeth; she's too good, too militantly meek, for me; but we mustn't give her the cold shoulder. It isn't decent."

"All very well for you," was the instant rejoinder. "With feminine relatives, it's the daughters who get the brunt of their sweet society. I'm not fond of tabbies. You can play cats-cradle with her if you like, Hughie, and keep her amused, winding wool and posting tracts to nabobs, baboos, and hottentots. I'm tired to death of cousins and Aunt Marias and all this family cant."

"Betty!" exclaimed her horrified father. "Cant! What! The Family! You don't mean it. No!"

"Family cant!" said Alice, her father's daughter, severely, after justice had been done to the paternal interlude. "Do you think we are insincere? As usual, your dress is gaping at

the back. We must treat Cousin Elizabeth nicely; but I must say I wish she would keep her kisses for—Hugh!”

Hugh had to laugh, and there was a general good-tempered titter, amidst which Mrs Arnold re-entered the room followed by the guest, who sat very upright on the edge of an armchair, and gazed about her shyly. She was earnestly trying to think of an improving topic of talk. A maid brought tea. Sir Anthony strode to, and stood before, the screened fireplace.

“Bravo, Alice!” said he. “I mean about the Family. We were talking, Elizabeth, about the glory of Family-life—how, so to speak, it anoints the realm and gilds the nation. A beautiful ideal! Without it, what anarchy might there not be!” He gazed at the modelled ceiling with thought in his eyes. “You sometimes hear illiterate, ill-conditioned fellows—the scum of the kingdom—without any lack of charity I may call them so—ah, you sometimes hear these fellows—or rather I do; that is, I sometimes read their rubbish which should not be printed—talk of bringing down things. Bringing down things! Overturning our institutions! Ha! They talk lightly of removing, of toppling-down, our—institutions. Let them try to do it! Let them try! If they do they will rouse the hornets, they will awake an irresistible army; vast, united with bonds of union stouter than steel. The yeomen of England will rise and crush, extinguish, their designs, the scoundrelly rascals! And what will be the true basis of that great and victorious

army? The Family; yes, the Family! There is the ideal which will keep our country great." He pulled thoughtfully at his chin, and smoothed his hair and waistcoat, making the watch-chain jingle. "You agree with me, Elizabeth?"

"Dear Cousin Anthony, indeed I do." She clasped her thin hands as if in entreaty.

"Of course you do! And our revered Aunt Maria? I am sure that so good, so inestimable a lady—the mind of the Victorians I might call her—holds opinions similar to mine; yes, and even more strongly than I do, I'll wager, if that be possible?"

"She does, she would! Thank you, dear Cousin Catherine. I don't take sugar except in Lent. Cream, thank you! Aunt Maria counsels cream because I am slender. Don't trouble, please, I can easily reach."

"Hugh, my son, pass your cousin the cake." He waited, while with nervous hand she took a piece. "Yes, Elizabeth, I was sure that Aunt Maria would agree with me on that important subject. I often think that if there were means for getting Aunt Maria's views and—ah—stand-point better known, if they could be written down and published, it would be to the benefit of the community, the whole community. She lives apart, she observes, and thinks. Tom, please, eat slowly. Her thoughts would represent culture, established position, true ancestry!"

"The very best," cried Elizabeth, with crowing meekness. Mr Arnold, not without intention, had touched on the subject which

beyond all others would break the ice of her shyness.

"That is true, Elizabeth. Whatever in life is up is worthily up. Be sure of that." The dear man was happily riding his hobby before that blessed fact, a new audience. She, good soul, showed appreciation and respect in every line of her pinched and apologetic countenance. She was always prepared eagerly to adore. Sir Anthony had no more ardent admirer.

"A great woman, Cousin Anthony!" she ventured solemnly to say. It sounded like the recital of a creed.

At that moment she caught her reflection in one of the many mirrors that lightened the room, and at once turned her eyes startled away.

"You have enunciated a Truth," he declared with earnestness, similar to hers.

"If the views of our Aunt Maria were held by all, how good, how virtuous the world would be! The task of the clergy would be lessened." The spinster sighed.

"M'yes," echoed Anthony. "And how is the wonderful lady?"

For a few moments Cousin Elizabeth could not find fit words for answer. She closed her eyes; her lips moved. With an effort, after catching and releasing her breath, she found reply.

"Wonderful she is, dear cousin; just wonderful! Such will and such watchfulness: had I been told there was such a being, had her virtues been just described to me, I could not have believed it: no, I could not!"

"Of course not, of course not," murmured the host. "Why not?"

"From the moment she wakes she wrestles with difficulties. Every morning I take her in a cup of China tea. She will not utter a word—such will-power!—until she has drunk it, lest she should say something hard and cross. I feel, Cousin Anthony, I feel she is a Spartan saint!"

"M'yes," once again was his comment.

"Then when she comes down she will not go near the fire until she has read Family prayers—her voice is commanding even now in her great age—and has conscientiously perused her many letters—some of them from Welsh clergy, so heartrending. Then I, or Bartlett when I'm not there, read the news to her; and if she does not approve of what the government is doing, she will send us away and lock herself into the room in order that we may not see how she suffers. Every inch of her is patriotic! When she approves, then Pompey, her dear but tiresome dog, or Tambourine the parrot—he can say two texts like a deacon—has a piece of sugar."

Her small eyes glistened with enthusiasm.

"Hum! she keeps a sharp look-out on all of us though, doesn't she, eh? No little naughtinesses! What?" Questions asked with archness.

"A loving look-out, dear cousin. 'I am the Great-Aunt of a well-bred English Family,' I sometimes hear her declare. She says it so proudly that it almost melts her hearers to tears."

The mere thought was enough for the gentle

cousin. She touched her eyes and nose with a mimic handkerchief.

Anthony took his cue. Having done his duty by introducing the hour of small-talk, he fussed off to the library, where, the while, he smoked a meditative cigar and played with papers. He was a man of many documents, and could never resist an invitation to new responsibilities of trusteeship. Without boasting, he prided himself on his numerous duties, and was always touched and pleased when references were made to the ever-growing burden and insistence of his work.

He was, willingly enough, brought out of his fastness by a clamorous ring of the door-bell, and the muffled sound of a well-known, martial voice.

The newcomers were Major and Mrs Cromwell-Smith. She—whose name might well have been Dowdy—was Mrs Arnold's younger sister ; but as different from her in interests and characteristics as is a pancake from a platitude. She had a pronounced minor-Wellington nose, a very kind heart, and an argumentative disposition, being especially prone to elementary home-made science. Every living-room in her flat had its library of text-books.

The Major was a well-brushed, youthful man of over sixty. He wore a grey frock-coat with the air of a buck, and would have talked early-Victorianese if his wife had not forbidden it. He wore long whiskers—weepers they were called in the days of his youth—and an eyeglass with a heavy black rim. His watch-guard was

ribbon. His neck-tie was very like a stock. He loved a white hat, and in the summer wore ducks. In the liberty of his club, where Mrs Cromwell-Smith could not intrude, he was apt to say "Demme!" That was the only approach he ever made to the forbidden earlier English. He was a completely domesticated man, and adored his wife.

There was the customary flutter—kissing and cackling—until the new arrivals settled down, and the tinkle of the tea-cups recommenced. Then, at the ripe dramatic moment, Sir Anthony bustled in. He carried a small revolver in his hand. He carried it with proper care, though he knew it was unloaded.

Elizabeth covered her ears with her hands.

"Cromwell, how-do! How-do, Harriet! I've made a new purchase. For safety's sake! for safety's sake! Now, I ask you, as a military man; one who, I may say—and I'm proud of it—has suffered for his country, on—ah—on the barrack-yard, what do you think of it? Is it good material? I'm assured it's English make. Must be so, to be good! Have I been robbed? I'm a child in these things. The instruments of destruction—ah!"

Major Cromwell-Smith who, after a quarter of a century's retirement from the militia, knew as much about modern fire-arms as a comparatively raw recruit, took and flourished the weapon.

"Please don't, dear Major!" cried Elizabeth. "If it went off!"

He ceased to flourish it, and shook a wise head.

"As things are, Tony, it is passable. In comparison with the weapons we fought with, a mere toy."

"A blunderbuss you'd recommend, I suppose, wouldn't you, uncle?" Hugh asked, as, yawning, he put down *Punch* and stretched a tired arm for the *Sketch*.

"Don't despise the old, my lad. Brown Bess was a bonny gun. She bruised your shoulder for weeks. As for the blunderbuss, it'll come into use again. You mark an old soldier's words. The proved is ever the best. Take that comfort to your heart, Hugh. Try as much as you please, you can't excel the old. I've known a man kill a cat through a brick wall with an old-fashioned blunderbuss." He paused to see how the assertion took. Only Tom showed incredulity.

"I've seen a man get a broken rib from the kick of a musket he was firing at a rabbit!"

Anthony was gazing thoughtfully at the lustred chandelier. He was not sure whether the Major was romancing, so preferred to be rapt with thought.

"I don't despise the old, uncle," Hugh was kind enough to remark. "I respect your point of view; but every improvement is an implied condemnation of whatever preceded it." He sat up in his chair, with something like energy, and showed eight inches of socks.

"Stuff, sir; stuff, sir; stuff! Improvements when they are improvements are reversions—

that's what they are. What did royal Solomon say? He was right. There's nothing new under the sun, unless it's a pretty face under a sunshade."

"Cromwell!" cautioned his wife.

"As for this pistol, it's a pretty toy. It will kill a man sufficiently well if it's aimed right, and provided — mark this, Anthony — Mark Anthony, ahem—provided you hold it close enough to the threatened object; but to fight with, if the Old Brigade should be called upon to unsheath swords and cutlasses, give me the old, old weapons—the Martini, black-powder cartridges—things of bangs, and smoke, and smell; they were sure and honest!"

He fingered his whisker thoughtfully. He might have slain thousands by the comfortable pride in his expression.

"What do you want that for, Cousin Anthony?" asked Elizabeth, venturing at last to take her hands from her ears.

"For safety! In these days, when so many red-handed gentry threaten the well-established—threaten property, religion, family life, Us—every householder should be prepared. It may yet be necessary for Britons to defend their homesteads. That reminds me, Tom; tell Travers to oil the lock of the garden door. You had better keep the cat out of the flower-beds, my dear," he added to his wife with heavy jocularly, "I might shoot Tobias by mistake."

"Put the thing away," counselled the Major, giving it back to Anthony. "These are dangerous toys when ladies and boys are about."

They really are not safe things to have in a house, they are liable to go off at any moment ; and you'd wake up to find yourself dead before you were aware of it. You can never trust them. The things one reads of nowadays ! Frown at a modern trigger and it itches to snap. Now, the triggers of the old weapons had to be pressed hard before they went off : and then, they threw so much to right or to left, or dooce knows where, that a man could hardly hit himself, let alone Tobias, if he tried to. These modern toys invite to crime. Put it away, Tony. Lock up the beastly thing ! ”

Anthony placed the revolver on the mantelpiece and entered upon the discussion of domestic personalities, trivialities, expectations, as was customary to these Family occasions. Presently, Betty rose and went to her room—to Work, as her father explained. She knew he would do his duty towards his literary daughter.

Hugh went also. He found—it was a new experience—that such gossip bored. He realised of a sudden he also had Work to do ; so, almost for the first time in his cushioned existence, he voluntarily and without suggestion of others, climbed the stairs to his room, took down, and with head on hand, and brains honestly trying to be at the business, read a student's law-book, wrestled with torts.

“What's the matter with Hugh ? ” asked Mrs Cromwell-Smith.

“Nothing,” answered Anthony, decisively. “Nothing. His appetite is good, isn't it mother ? ”

"I thought he looked worried," Aunt Harriet continued.

"I expect he's been up to mischief," the Major cried. "The young dogs! I know 'em. Their password is Righto! They are mum as mummies at home; daddy's boys, and what not; there the song is 'Obadiah, Obadiah, I am shy!' but out in the world it's 'Champagne Charlie.' I know 'em! We know, don't we, Tony? In our days we weren't so tongue-tied and smug about our virtues, or our——"

"Ambitions," suggested Sir Anthony, emphatically, with an eye roving from Millicent to Elizabeth; both listening keenly, though only Millicent showed it.

"Call it so, if you like. I'm only a blunt soldier, one of the old brigade. I haven't your comfortable choice of words; but, by George! whether we kissed a maid or——"

"Cromwell!" exclaimed his wife. Cousin Elizabeth was looking at the pattern of the carpet. Her ears were alert.

"All right, my dear, kissing is a virtue—or punched the head of a saucy butcher, we did it thoroughly. In these milk and thank-you-so-much times, young men haven't the pluck to do anything decently wild. They don't sow wild oats. Oh dear, no! They rear 'em on barley-water. They read the cricket results, work out batting averages, play mixed hockey, press their trousers, grow their hair long; pah! the meandering maundering lambs! As for the girls—hoydens! They go to the other extreme. They

didn't play hockey and golf, or wear open-work round their chests in my young days." The fire passed from his eyes. "Worse luck!" he added.

"Really, Cromwell, really!" cried his wife.

"It's all right Harriet," said Anthony tolerantly, with a mild boom of laughter. "Cromwell must have his extravagances. It's only his bright way. But if Aunt Maria knew you held these views, Major, she would faint, sir—faint!"

"Not faint, dear Cousin Anthony," Elizabeth corrected, venturing to look at the Major with eyes of young animosity, "she would be too—too shocked to faint. Ribaldry makes her steel."

"Forgive me," cried the delinquent, twisting the points of his right whisker. "I was too blunt. The truth always carries me away. Pity the infirmities of an old soldier. I forgot the respect due to—simple maidenhood. It was—Anthony's fault. He began it."

"What? Come, come, Major. I protest. That is not exactly—ah! The truth should not be tampered with, even in flippancy. We will say no more about it." He took the revolver. "Would you like to try this in the garden?"

"Heaven forbid! If it were a blunderbuss and Tobias were there, perhaps my sporting tendencies might tempt me; but pop with that drawing-room instrument and a public road not fifty yards away?—no, thank you, brother-in-law! I should be sure to shoot a baby; and some people have exaggerated ideas of their importance. Is that clock right? Egad! Harriet, we must be going"—he looked at a

gold watch almost as large as a chronometer—"though it is hard to tear ourselves away from this realm of luxury."

"Not yet," implored Mrs Arnold.

"My dear," said Aunt Harriet, "we are going this evening to a lecture at the Notting Dale Athenæum, on 'The Curve of the Cockle-shell,' by the famous Professor—what is his name? I never can remember these notabilities; there are so many. But he's scientific, and is going to tell us why a cockle-shell and a cork-screw curve the same way. It is really wonderful what the human mind can do. The Major says we should never let the mind rust, so I'm taking him."

"And I don't want to go in the least. Winkles were a luxury of our boyhood—where, where are winkles to-day, and where are shrimps? but cockles are uninteresting fish. It's the same story. These are degenerate times. So many simple pleasures have gone overboard. I go to that lecture under protest, my love. Not to learn, or rid my mind of rust—my mind of rust!—but to protect you." He indulged in a mock-heroic attitude. "Times have changed, alas! but the chivalry of one old soldier, at any rate, shall not change. Elizabeth, I wish you would come too. I think I can safely promise that the subject would not shock you. Forgive me, my dear!" He well might beg this, for the meek and gentle lady had shrunk back, obviously disconcerted. "We must go. Harriet, arise! Elizabeth, Catherine, Anthony—all, bless you: good-bye!"

CHAPTER V

THE YOUNG IDEA

ALTHOUGH Hugh Arnold was now reading hard, working hard, and schooling himself carefully in discipline and patience, he became more unsettled daily, till he was restless as a caged blackbird at the coming of spring. He was convinced that if his individuality were not to be curbed and shrouded, he must leave that easy home to rough it in London, alone. He came slowly, reluctantly, to this decision. That was the only solution to his restlessness and ill-content. He needed a spell of hard times and short commons. He needed the iron of hardship. He knew it well.

He determined to speak to his father, and—for he was a gentle-hearted, kind youth—planned how to broach the subject in a manner the least offensive and the most practical. He was honestly desirous of not hurting the feelings of anyone, and knew the break he contemplated would be difficult and likely to be misunderstood. He must mix his revolution with as much rose-water as possible. He could not think how best to do it, and there was nobody to consult. The

kindness of his father and mother required the pressure of the soft pedal.

Repeatedly—it became a sort of obsession—during the fortnight that followed Elizabeth's arrival, he had led up to the subject of his purposed independence; but always an unexpected something had caused the occasion not to be opportune.

It was hard to catch his father and mother alone together, and it was desirable, when he sprang his surprise upon them, that Alice and Betty should not be present. He did not see himself making his appeal with either of those keen-eyed critics there.

Even the business hours in the study, when Sir Anthony smoked his cigar and wrestled with papers of trusteeship and much-altered lists of investments, proved impossible. They were a long-established institution of uninterruptable time. To trouble his father then would be the breach of an unwritten law, established and fixed by custom. The Dene was full of such laws. Sir Anthony assumed they would be kept; his wife saw that they were kept. Hugh became mildly desperate and highly impatient.

Sir Anthony was not unconscious of Hugh's restlessness. He had misread its symptoms, as every man of his type would have done. He could not have imagined that Hugh's wish to go to hard conditions, away from home, could be real. Mrs Arnold was far more justly observant. Aunt Harriet's remark, confirming her impression, had opened her eyes, and she had a shrewd faculty

for putting two and two together. She spoke to his father, telling him her belief. At first he was pained by the information; and then, realising its significance, pooh-poohed it. He could not believe such a thing. It was—ah—preposterous! What more could Hugh possibly want than he already enjoyed? He was training for the Law, wasn't he?—and that was a gentleman's profession, with possibilities opening to the finest heights of ambition. What more could any lad desire? Was not that aim and object enough? He had every advantage, social and otherwise, to aid him. And, anyhow, the boy could not know as well as he did, with his experience of years and knowledge of the awkward corners of the world.

So the good man, not so strong and bold as his mien suggested, shelved the questions. He was, however, conscious of a new kind of nervousness whenever Hugh was beside him. Once he caught himself expressing a significant, unspoken wish. He hoped Hugh was not going to be ungrateful. That was how he put it. The discovery of that fear frightened him.

"Chu! Chu!" he said to Tobias, who was making a coat-brush of his trousers. Tobias stalked away, offended. Something was upsetting the master, that was evident.

Hugh became conscious that his restlessness and its cause were suspected. He thereupon determined, one not offering, to make opportunity for talk. This uncertainty must end. He thought of writing a letter, but that seemed a clumsy

method. He pondered as to whether he might speak to his mother, but that seemed weak. So on one of the aunt's birthdays—the Family kept such occasions seriously, and it seemed opportune to his purpose—he waited for his father in the garden. When he heard the salute of the motor-car hurtling along after its struggle up Chilston Hill, he went to the gate.

Betty, croquet-mallet in hand, curious and companionable, joined him there. This was, he felt, a nuisance; but he would not be pushed from his project.

"I want to speak to father, Betty," he said.

"So do I," she answered, confidently. "And it's rather important. I'm going to ask him to get one of his typists at the office to copy some of my manuscripts. I'm sure they often have time."

"Well, let me speak first—there's a dear!"

"Really! the selfishness of brothers—and sisters! You and Alice have no thought for others; and my lot—the lot of all artists—is difficult enough. There is no encouragement whatever from relatives! disgusting!" And she sulked away.

"Hullo! what is the matter with Betty, eh?" asked Sir Anthony, as he descended from the car. "You never quarrel with her, do you, my boy?"

"No, father, never! Can you spare me a few minutes before dinner-time?" he added.

An expression of anxiety crept as a shadow across Sir Anthony's face. Hugh noticed it.

His heart sank. "I'm not going to distress you," he hastily added, "—or mother."

At this, Betty, who had not carried her dignity out of earshot, returned hurriedly, interested.

"Hullo, pater! Does it concern the Family, Hugh?" she asked.

"No, Betty; or if it does, then only very indirectly."

Sir Anthony, his troubled expression deepened, was proceeding to the house. He paused on the moment, and turned as if to speak; but evidently changed his mind, for he said nothing and went on. Hugh felt his confidence oozing away. This was a new aspect of his father. How hard it was that he must plead for liberty to develop himself, while so many youths in his position were entirely untroubled by hindrances. Why could not he be treated as a man and responsible, and not for ever be made to feel the harness of leading strings? His momentary nervousness passed into the old sense of impatience, and even—momentary this also—of vague irritation.

As Anthony Arnold entered the house, his wife, as usual, came to meet him. She took his coat, saw the trouble speaking in his face, and wondered why. Business, she supposed. Her husband was apt to carry his office anxieties home, though he never spoke about them to anyone. They were a little more private than a prophet's tomb.

"Hugh wants to speak to us, my dear. Will

you come into the library while we hear what he has to say."

He opened the door for her. His eyes rested on her fondly. He seemed to find comfort in her placidity. He pulled at his waistcoat and braced his spirits.

He returned to the open front door when she had passed through, and called peremptorily, "Hugh, your mother and I are waiting. If you please——!"

"As it concerns the Family, I also will come," Betty declared. "I have a request to make—a boon to ask of you, father."

"Oh!" said he touchily, "but yours, my dear, yours can't be very important."

"Father!" she cried indignantly. The artist was all of a ruffle. She stood and stared with eyebrows raised.

"I beg your pardon, Betty, I'm sure," he answered gently. "There are worries. I'm tired. Shall Betty come in, Hugh?"

"I would rather she didn't, father; but I won't press it if she'll be unhappy outside, and I won't bother you now, if you'd rather put it off."

"No, no! good lad!" said Sir Anthony. "Come in, both of you, and let us get it over."

Hugh's heart again sank at the formalities there-upon displayed. His father sat at his desk in the centre of the library, facing the windows, like a king's counsellor, preparing to give an opinion, or the chairman of a very prosperous company at a board meeting, or a mayor sitting for his

portrait. With nervous fingers he arranged the neat rows of papers on his desk, opened and shut an inkpot, rattled the pens on the inkstand, finally put on his pince-nez. He breathed, hem! He made it evident he was waiting for Hugh to begin.

Mrs Arnold was seated on a settee before the window to the right of her husband. Her face was in shadow. Hugh knew she was watching intently; and that neither by word nor by sign would she contribute to the discussion. If she could make the way easier for anyone, she would; but to do so on this occasion would not be easy.

Betty sprawled in an armchair. She touched, by accident, a little table, and noticed the new revolver lying there. She shuddered rather prettily. She could look attractive sometimes. Her dark grey eyes were rather nice.

"Father, really this oughtn't to be lying about. It's not safe. If Cousin Elizabeth saw it, she'd"—she laughed—"telegraph to Aunt Maria!"

"No, it shouldn't. I'm sorry!" Sir Anthony was still very serious. "I'll put it away. It's all right: it's not loaded." He rose and took the weapon from her, and put it, not in a drawer of his knee-hole desk, but under the lid of a little ornamental escritoire standing in the recess of the window to his left which opened on to the balcony. He paused to close the window that was open.

Hugh waited until he resumed his seat, and had once again gone through the opening and

shutting of the inkpot, and the other small acts of order customary to him.

"Thank you for letting me speak to you. I want to be frank, and I don't want to—I won't—distress you. There is no reason why I should cause you or mother any distress," Hugh began with some hesitation.

"I'm sure you won't," Sir Anthony answered gently. "We—we are confident in our children's kindness; aren't we, mother?"

"Yes, yes, dear!" she replied.

"Well, what is it, Hugh? Speak out. It cannot, I know, be anything discreditable, and I hope it's nothing rash—nothing that would bring even a tinge of anxiety, or regret, or sorrow to any member of the Family."

"Not a bit! I think you'll approve. It is this. I am tired of easiness. This home is too—too jolly comfortable. I want to work, to do something." He clenched the fist resting on his knee and stared out of the window. "You and mother have been perfectly good to all of us. You've given us—Betty, all, will echo me—a home as happy, and easy, and jolly as home can be. Don't think I don't appreciate that. I do; right through and through I do."

"Yes, yes," said Anthony, touched by his son's earnestness. The father—enthroned man!—was not so far at that moment from the honourable well of tears. Under the crust of his pomposity was more than his fair share of feeling.

"But I'm tired of it! I want to go out in the world, to have the chance of hard times, as other

men do. I want to rough it, father, as I'm sure you did, when you were my age." Anthony looked at him thoughtfully. He said not a word. "As it is, I feel that I don't appreciate your kindness and these good things as I ought to." Betty showed the promise of speaking, but Hugh went on. "I am restless, just because it is all so comfortable. I want to know what it is like to fight and overcome hardships. I can do it, father! I have muscle, will, brains, and the rest of it; or I suppose I have; and I want to use them; to be put to the test; to know the strain; to feel tired; to have bad luck for a spell; to know what those who have never had homes like this feel, when they are down in the cold grip of things. Do you see what I want, father?"

"Some University settlement for a time," suggested Betty, "where earnest young men pat the poor on the head for their own soul's sake."

"No," was the impatient answer, almost angry, it seemed. "I want something real."

Anthony had been appealed to. He had been following Hugh's words with a troubled uncertainty. His wife, from her shadowed corner, was watching his face. Its expression was new to her. She was, without fully realising it, mildly surprised. He, who hitherto had always been prompt in delivering an infallible, summary judgment, was, on this occasion, evidently undecided and perplexed. She had never before seen him so. He leaned back in his chair; his

idle fingers played with a paper knife. He screwed up his eyes as would one peering through biting fogs and mists. He opened his lips as if he were taking a gulp of air.

"Father!" his wife said.

"When I was a young man," he began slowly, as if reluctantly, "I was grateful for whatever was given me." He turned slightly to look at an enlarged daguerreotype of his father, an austere man with a Nonconformist beard and clean-shaven obstinate upper lip. "I did not have all this comfort—" he indicated, with a wave of his hand, the comparatively sumptuous upholstery of the library—"but I was not discontented with my lot."

"Neither am I, father!" Hugh broke in, eager not to be misunderstood.

"Allow me! You have spoken. It is—ah—my turn to speak, to claim attention." He put down the paper knife, and for the first time looked at Hugh determinately. "Your grandfather—a strong man, hard and true—used to say to me, 'Tony,' he said, 'when I'—meaning he—'was a young man, I have starved. I have walked the streets penniless,' he declared. 'I have seen the sunrise on London Bridge quite a score of times'—his father suddenly lost his means in a cotton smash, though the Family always was highly respected—'because it was too cold for sleep in the streets'—in the streets, mind—'and it was warmer wandering. I swore—' I remember so well the old man saying it to me—'that if ever I had children they should

not suffer and want as I did.' That, Hugh, was what your grandfather, Michael Arnold, said, and he kept his word. He was always a man of his word. He worked to make money, in order to buy comfort and security for my sister and for me, his only son. Ask our Aunt Maria, she knows! He made me promise solemnly that I would do the same if I had children, and I have obeyed him absolutely, have I not?"

"You have, father," cried Betty.

"Certainly, you have," said Hugh.

"Certainly, I have!" echoed Sir Anthony, warming his way into confidence, and pulling at his white waistcoat in order that it should set right. "Very well, then!"

He paused after this encouragement, and then went on. His state of slowness and uncertainty had fallen from him. His natural confidence had quite returned.

"I know, from experience, that these comforts you despise"—Hugh was restless again at this; but he suppressed his protest—"are exactly the things which matter. To put the case extremely. What makes criminals? Why, want, discomfort, squalor. Isn't it so? Read the ha'penny papers, pah! You children think little of having plenty of nice, nourishing food, soft beds to lie in; books, pictures, cushioned chairs, pile carpets, a motor-car. Look at the comfort of this house. It has cost your mother and me hundreds and hundreds to furnish it. And, my boy, it is exactly these things which make life worth living. Take them away, as they were away in your

grandfather's life, in my young days also, to some extent, and what is left?—ugliness and nakedness, inducing meanness. Ah, yes, that is so!”

He rose and walked to the fireplace, leaning one arm, in his favourite attitude, on the mantelpiece. His wife moved quietly to a chair by the side of Hugh, and rested a kind hand on his arm.

“Meanness! It is from meanness of soul, and hope, and aim that crime comes.” He paused in a large way to consider his subject. Hugh shifted his feet. His father raised a commanding hand to stop a possible interruption. “The great criminals, they were greatly mean. You may tell me that the hermits lived with discomfort and yet lived godly lives. I despise the hermits.”—the emphasis of that despise!—“They cannot have been in their right minds; certainly—certainly—they did nothing for the world—nothing to brighten and mend it—or for themselves, so far as I can see.”

Just then, Tom, home from school, looking a podgy tub in his Eton jacket, put his head in at the door.

“What good were hermits, Tom?” his father asked.

Tom looked puzzled. He had a vague idea they were some sort of insect used for fishing, and felt stuffily indignant that he should be questioned on knowledge out of school-hours.

“What are hermits, Tom?”

Tom's look of puzzlement went. A light shone in his eyes. “A sort of racehorse, I believe,” he said; and went, banging the door

behind him. Betty laughed, and took an adjacent Family portrait album to look at while listening.

"Really, father, if I may say so, I don't see what this has to do with my case," Hugh ventured to say. "This talk about hermits and meanness——"

"You soon will! You must not be impatient, Hugh. You wanted us—urged me though I arrived home tired—to talk things over. You have said what you wished to say; now you must hear me. This sort of thing cannot—ah—be dealt with in three words or in merely ten; can it, mother?" She shook her head and sighed. "Very well, then."

Tom could then again be heard in the garden, knocking about croquet-balls. The wooden whacking and clatter went on for a few minutes; then there was a smash of glass. The rattle of the croquet-balls ceased. Three minutes afterwards the noise of the impact of ivory began in the billiard-room above. Two of the balls fell to the floor—thud, thud, and a roll! Tom was amusing himself. Meanwhile, the father went on with his wisdom of experience.

"Without a decent measure of comfort and leisure, England could never have achieved her greatness——"

Sprites of a sudden began to titillate Hugh's sense of humour. With an effort he held them in leash.

"—It is the well-fed, well-clad, well brought-up, decent, respectable people who are the backbone of the Empire. Only a little insight is

required to see that. So, my boy, you realise you are labouring under a big mistake when you depreciate, even by a hair's-breadth, your heritage of good things."

"But, father, I don't—" It was no use. Chanticleer was not going to be put out of song. Hugh leaned forward with his face in his hands.

"Do not? Here we give you a home which nine persons out of ten would be pleased and proud to possess. Your mother and I labour daily to provide you with the best of everything—everything. And now you want to leave us, to shake the dust of your feet upon our doorstep. Oh!"

He shook his head and looked seriously at his wife.

The sprites were working harder to cause an incongruous explosion. Hugh wrestled desperately with an hysterical tendency. This jeremiad was all too ridiculous. Where were Sir Anthony's sense of humour and ideas of proportion? It was kind-hearted obtuseness, well-intentioned but impossible. How could he make the obvious evident? His father was the reverse of a stupid man; yet he would not see. Anyhow, it was no use to interrupt. His father must be listened to courteously: and then, with or without parental consent, Hugh must do as he intended—must, somehow, please himself.

Mrs Arnold moved her head in response to the serious appeal of her husband. She said nothing. She was ever the silent chorus.

"It is the fashion, nowadays, on the part of certain persons, whose ideas—and no doubt their lives—are shameless,"—Sir Anthony glared at the wall—"to jeer at respectability. It is a long word: it means much. Well, I will be bold enough to declare that respectability is the sheet-anchor of the glory of Great Britain. Respectability belongs to those who have self-respect. Very well, then! Our word is as good as our bond all the world over. Would it be so if we were not a respectable, self-respecting people; if we did not refrain from sharing the light-minded, glittering pleasures of the Continental Sunday—I've seen young men in the Champs Elysées on the Sabbath wearing false noses—if our manufactures were not sound, real genuine goods—goods, a significant word—and not mere Brummagem makebelieve or stuff made in Germany. Certainly not! Then Betty by her presence reminds me of the all-important world of literature, of Art, as she would say."

"It is unquestionably Art," asserted the unknown novelist, as she licked the tip of her right-hand middle-finger to reduce an ink-stain.

"Quite so! we should be a less respectable people if our literature had not successfully resisted the pestilent tendency to which foreign writers are prone, of playing with the nudities of life! Ha! my boy, you depreciate our self-respect——"

"No! no!" cried Hugh, unheeded.

"But we—we, the British—thanks to the prosperity accruing to a good name—could buy

up anything the world over, provided we wanted it, with solid yellow cash! The English sovereign is a passport everywhere. The English sovereign, like the English character, is sterling gold, sound metal; not glittering veneer, or minted moonshine. Very well, then! I wanted to make that clear; for now, mother, comes the application! Could all this be possible if our homes were naked and squalid, our people starved, miserable, shabby, ragged? It could not!"—the ivory thunder was rolling overhead—"Oh, dear! Betty, please go and tell Tom that if he must make a noise, he had better go into the garden again. When you've told him, you can come back if you like."

Betty obeyed at once, with suspicious willingness. As she went by Hugh, she screwed up her nose in impudent contempt. Again the sprites made effort to rebel, but with another resolute effort—to laugh would have been so impossible—he kept them reined. She did not return.

"Then, my boy, you talk about work. Work! Good heavens! can't you work as you are? What have you been doing all these months?—all these years I may say since you left school and had Mr Bannerman to tutor you? What does your reading amount to? I thought a young fellow studying for the Bar had quite enough to do, if, at the same time, he remembered his home and his social duties. These must not be neglected—no, indeed; his social duties particularly, because, unless a barrister is known and

popular among his acquaintances, he can hardly obtain interest, briefs, the opportunity of securing that prominence in the—ah—public eye which is called distinction and success. Yet, my boy, now I come to think of it, I have not remarked any excessive zeal for study on your part, or any specially energetic efforts to make yourself widely known and your talents—your inherited talents—respected. I did not—your mother did not—mind this so much, because to be reading for the Bar, to be a barrister—a most honourable profession, the most exclusive—I almost—ah—wish I had followed the law”—he paused as he enjoyed a mind-picture of himself in judge's ermine, making jokes—“would—ah—it would in the natural course of circumstances be enough for us; but now that you are discontented—discontented, and—ah—talk of desiring to work, I may reply—yes, retort—do the work, Hugh, you have been trained to do, perform the task to your hand; be called, follow politics. Do these things, and opportunities shall be made for you. I pledge my word for it, and—ah—my purse! If only I had had your opportunities. Well, well! we live again in our children; don't we, mother? Betty didn't come back after all. You shall have money, Hugh; I am not poor—indeed, I may be called rich. If you work and will to do it—you may be—Lord Chancellor. A life of effort and earnestness—I had not your advantages—and—ah—the beautiful companionship of a perfect wife”—he stepped across magnificently, and stooped to take Mrs Arnold's

hand. He touched it with his lips, straightened his shoulders, lightly stroked his moustache, and returned to the fireplace—"have brought me gold and influence enough to help you even—I'm sure I may say—to a front place. Very well! You can do all this, you see, and still live in your home. So Hugh, my dear boy, our son, having talked it over together, as a father and son should do, we may regard the matter as settled."

Hugh gave a deep breath. He had become pale and was trembling.

"I'm sorry—I'm afraid not, father."

"Hey, what? What's that?" Chanticleer was transformed into something of a bristly boar, all eagerness and suspicions.

Hugh rose to his feet. His face was drawn with excitement, his eyes were aglow.

"You will not see my point of view, father," he declared, with unexpected fervour and bluntness. "I tried to explain it. You will not see it. I despair of making you see it. I must work my own way. That you would help me generously, I know, I'm sure; but you will not grant me my individuality. I have gone in for the Law because you wished it. I'm not a child: I'm twenty-five. I've never been allowed to say a word as to my aims and ambitions. It isn't fair! When I was in the nursery, you determined I should be a barrister. Perhaps I will. Yes, probably I will. You've both been awfully kind. But because I have been told to do this, and told not to do that, without any

consideration for my own bent and tastes, at your will, I have lost—if ever I had it—any possible zest for the Bar, or politics, or anything else of the kind. I've been trying to read these last days, and I hate it. And that is why I want to fend for myself, to find myself—I've told you plainly. Do you see?"

"I do, and I am ashamed of your rudeness and ingratitude," was the fierce answer.

Sir Anthony was so indignant that he spluttered for words.

"Hush, Hugh! Hush, father!" the gentle mother appealed. "Come!"

Both men were ashamed at once.

"I'm sorry for what I said," Hugh hastened to protest, "I beg your pardon! I didn't mean to hurt you, or to be ungrateful or rude—not for an instant."

The appeal at once wrought effect on Anthony's gentle heart and emotions.

"I'm sure of it, my boy; I was hasty too. We still can—ah—talk it over without loss of temper, like—like gentlemen. Indeed, we must do so. *Noblesse oblige*. That's the motto! This discussion concerns the Family; we must remember that. In this England of ours," he continued magnificently, as he rediscovered himself and regained confidence, "a man is not a solitary unit; he is but one of the—ah—nucleus of those who love him and whom he loves. The Family—never forget it, Hugh—is amongst our finest institutions. The strength of the Empire may be said to depend upon the Family, on the home,

on comfort and decency, on a basis of God-fearing respectability. Hugh, I beg you, don't forget this. Any and every act which—in however small a measure—hurts any of these things, injures England, our dear country, and so hurts us. We——”

The dressing-bell rang.

“Bless me! how the time has flown. Well, well, my boy! Have it your own way. It does not do to keep the young idea imprisoned. We mustn't clip the wings of our chicks, must we, mother? It's a wrench; but—parents are born for wrenches. Go with our blessing, my boy. We must—ah—consider ways and means. You shall have provision made for you. Yes, you must, you shall. I insist! You must allow us to have our way about that—eh, mother? Never shall it be said that our eldest son, the hope of the Family—remember you are that—wanted the wherewithal, while his father, his old father, was lapped in plenty. Very well, then! Let us go and get ready for dinner. Unpunctuality at mealtimes invariably marks the unready citizen. So don't be late, Hugh. It is such a bad example for Betty. The literary temperaments hate regularity of appointments, I have observed.”

They went their ways. The discussion was adjourned, not unhappily. Mrs Arnold kissed her son, and then followed her husband slowly. She was not without anxiety. She was never without anxiety. She—true mother—bore burdens, some imaginary, all weighty; especi-

ally weighty were those which did not exist.

“Neither of them thought for an instant of Aunt Maria,” she said to herself, as she paused by the door to see if a bronze Mercury perched on a wall-bracket was perfectly dust-free.

CHAPTER VI

STAFFORD'S INN

WITHIN the fortnight, Hugh was installed in rooms in Stafford's Inn, a well-known hive of Bohemian discomfort, not a hundred miles from the Law-Court's end of Fleet Street.

He had discovered those chambers through an acquaintance, a journalist, Roderick Brook, who lived passably well as the generally-everything man on that unimportant print, the "Evening Mercury"; and had engaged them on the spur of a moment for three good reasons, to him quite sufficient—they suited his requirements, so far as roughing it was concerned; they were centrally situated—whenever he went afield from them, he must be wandering from the hub of the City's hum, as Roddy Brook, an intolerant self-quoter, once put it in a column of padding; and, lastly, they were next door to, on the same floor as, the domestic haven of that willing and useful friend.

So far as discomfort may be enjoyable, as then it was to his young energies, Hugh was in clover. It was, he found, delightful to be in want of a corkscrew, not to have space enough

in which to swing a cat (curious exercise!), to be able to sport his oak.

Hugh at last had won his battle, but it was after all only a comparative victory, for his father, prompt to realise the inevitable, and impressed by his son's determined earnestness, had made such a generous fuss of it, giving way and helping towards the new establishment, that Hugh was plainly given the impression it was only to a minor extent his own doing. Sir Anthony, not from design or through astuteness, but through a wibbly-wobbly spirit, had accepted the circumstances in such diverse ways; at first so unwillingly, then with such thoroughness, that—the artfulness of some simplicity!—whatever the results of the experiment might be, he was bound to be true prophet. “I told you so,” could only be the last words in the episode, so far as he was concerned. To him they were invariably the most comfortable.

Hugh realised this, and, after one impatient shrug of the shoulders, was content that it should be so. He settled down in his cramped and inconvenient quarters with true campaigner's spirit, and set to work to compel and conquer Fortune—no wooing of the jade for him!

He was young enough to be entirely hopeful, and supremely confident. He saw visions and dreamed dreams in a manner worthy of his father's son.

But that settling down! When is such experience not a sort of unhumorous, dreary harlequinade? Hugh hammered nails, hung pictures,

framed photographs, tacked carpets, with the enthusiasm of a neophyte, conscious of inexpertness. He endured the woes and wants of those noisy days with a philosophy almost unbecoming; and was helped with the greater inexpertness by Roddy.

"So sorry. So awfully sorry!" cried the journalist, as he put a screwdriver through a treasured school-group.

"Juggins! No matter! I expect I can get another copy. Chuck us the picture-books! Look out! your foot's in the marmalade! You've upset the dumb-bells!"

"Sorry; so awfully sorry!"

Roddy Brook, freckled and sandy, as well as careless, was that knight of the errant pen. He had plenty of confidence in his talents, and was eager to do anything and everything, if only in a so-so manner. He would write a bad poem, or do a step-dance, or vamp an accompaniment as inadequately and cheerfully as anyone. His willingness to be helpful, to be useful, to be, somehow, generally kind, was, indeed, almost a piece of sublimity. Hugh, in his young gratitude, found it quite sublime. He measured Roddy by the standard of his ardent willingness; and although—in their common affairs—things were broken and spilt, and affairs arranged with some splendid derangements, what was the matter of that? The imperfections merely made existence so much the pleasanter, as the discomforts of a camp or picnic are, for a time, found preferable to the comforts of home.

The rooms these young men occupied adjoined. According to the prehistoric economy of Stafford's Inn, there is one water-tap only to every floor; and as every tenant has the privilege of paying water-rate, that single water-tap comes to be used for two sets of chambers. Hugh was the fortunate owner of the one and only tap; and as Roddy Brook was always requiring more of the necessary element than his laundress stored for him in jugs, cans, and basins, for washing purposes, whisky, and watering plants (Roddy was occasionally proud of some frizzled things in a window-box), he became a frequent, welcome visitor to Hugh's quarters. The oak would never be sported against him. The two became fast friends and intimates.

But again—that settling down! There had been five days of frenzied furnishing, of purchasing and packing. The Dene and Great Queen Street had been ransacked for added comforts and necessaries. There was a pell-mell of confusion, much confounded. To settle in those rooms—there were but two with a cupboard, called by courtesy a kitchen, crowded with a shiny gas-stove—required miracles of packing and patience, and caused headaches sufficient for the discovery of something worth patenting. But all's well that ends in good humour—as that experience concluded and began.

It was with a great sigh of satisfaction that Hugh sported his oak when, the last nail driven home, the last picture hung—awry, Roddy, after

prodigies of labour, had gone. The master of nearly all he surveyed lighted a cigarette, tumbled into a lounge chair, and, dog-tired, revelled in his independence. The solid comfort of his father's home was reflected here. There was not really a hard corner or an inelegance in the rooms. Hugh had proved that he owned a pretty taste for furniture.

The sky gradually darkened. He gazed, meditated, dreamed, planned. The hum and hooting of heavy traffic went, without ending, on. A great star, Jupiter, beamed mistily through a network of branches. A small clock within the Inn sang the hour, thereupon to be repeated by the boom of the Law Court's bell, and from further distances, by other sonorous voices of Time. The chorus put an end to that lengthened mood of *dolce far niente*. Now what to do? He roused himself, leaving plans of work till the morrow, to get supper at a Strand caravanserai—every detail of the meal was democratic except the coffee, which belonged to the high class—and then to his chambers—*his* chambers—to sleep.

He was awakened at eight—with the taste of London in his mouth and the countryman's ache in his head—by Mrs Stevens, a brown and shapeless lady, who lived by minding, mending, and cleaning for others. Life's vista was, to her, a continuous prospect of other person's doors to be knocked at and quietly opened, revealing housewifely duties waiting within to be somehow done. The census paper knew her

as a "laundress" in Stafford's Inn. She was otherwise not particularly known to fame.

She looked after the domestic well-being—to use rather too nice an expression—of Hugh and Roderick Brook; and was prepared to act in a motherly manner to either or both of them, whenever they were weak enough to allow it. They resisted her assumption of maternal authority with as much firmness as their natural gentleness permitted; but could no more escape from the torrents of prose she poured upon them, than Mrs Brown, by going to Margate, was able to get away from the comet.

She implored Hugh, almost as soon as she saw him, to keep the whisky always locked up, because she could not bear that he should ever, even for a moment, suspect her. She prided herself repeatedly on being honest as the day.

Mrs Steven's attitude to Hugh was that of an apologetic patroness. She saw in him a novice, deprived of the comforts of home, and was convinced that she herself could provide them. She was so truly well-meaning that Hugh endured her benevolence with the patience of the martyr who knows he is being martyred; until she began to cook for him "tasteful dainties." She called them little surprises, and he accepted the word. That was enough to rouse the most sheep-like lamb, and cause him to put on horns. She was a poor judge of eggs; and was honestly mistaken as to when things were cooked. It ended with Hugh learning to get his own breakfast; but that could not be yet. Meanwhile, for

a couple of days Stevens held absolute sway. She was a power wielding misdirected beneficence. She potted among the pans, and floundered to and fro when he was working, in the most earnest endeavour to prove herself attentive. For the sheer sake of peace he sent her to buy stationery, and then flowers for the window-sill. Fortunately, before his exasperation had broken from the collar, she had to hear the call of duties on another floor, and left him to work in peace. He heard her shuffling downstairs and out into the quadrangle; and then shut his outer door with a bang.

Now he was really his own man. He went to work willingly, opened a bulky law-book, and forgot even the hum of the traffic, even the chirping of insistent sparrows—Roddy Brook had called the Inn Sparadise—even the call of the clocks, in the law's authoritative dullness. Ambition began to enwrap him in King's Counsellor's robes.

At one o'clock to the stroke on the second day of Hugh's settlement, Brook hammered at the door, and came in, carrying a bedroom-jug to borrow water. He was full of apologies and excuses, in which flowers, a leak, whisky, and a choked rain-pipe were confusedly commingled. Hugh was glad of the break. He shut the law-book and rubbed his forehead.

"You are always welcome, Brook," he said. "Just say 'Water': it will be as good as 'Open Sesame,' and that door will always open unto you."

"Good man! So be it. You are evidently a humorist. You are one of the few I have known whom I can trust never to pun on my name. The word 'Water' is irresistible to most of my acquaintances. By the same token, Whisky shall be the 'Open Sesame' to my bright abode. Let us lunch, shall we; and so let the cannakin clink, clink?"

"Yes, gladly. Where?"

"Where? Here, my Daniel, here! I'll send for some steak. We have bread and that which to Scottish heart—my mother was a Scots-woman—is better than bread; and what more is wanted when hunger gives the sauce?"

"The humble, necessary cook."

"Cook, bejiggered! 'Cook,' to me, a journalist! I'll cook you anything from a mutton-chop to an angel's wing, and make a decent salad out of hat trimmings."

"No, thank you, Roderick."

"What? I tell you I'm an old campaigner. I've toasted a herring over a gas-jet many a time and made a treacle pudding without treacle. The man of the road who can't cook anything, and pluck it, if necessary, at a half-moment's notice, is good for nothing but magazine poetry. I'll send for that steak."

"But, really, Roddy, I'm hungry. Mrs Stevens got my breakfast, and since then——"

"Since then! goodness me! That's enough! Stevens? You let her cook you anything? That's more than enough. Now you shall have something to eat!—to eat! Stevens! She has

as much capacity for decent plain cooking as an elephant for hat-pins. She hasn't the veriest rudiments. I offered to teach her once; and the good goat nearly fell on me. She is a soul, my lad, a soul in a quarter-mile waistband; but—cook! Wait a minute!"

Hugh heard the mercurial journalist leaping and hurrying down the wooden curving stairs. Clatter, clatter down—a pause—and clatter, clatter up.

"That's settled," said he, breathing heavily. "We will light the gas-stove, and you shall use my frying-pan as Stevens hasn't dreamed of getting one. Her brain is a sort of doughnut. You must buy a frying-pan—home is not home till it has smelt sizzling sausages. I'll give that bright lad ten minutes, and if he is not back by then with the steak—a poem in scarlet with a layer of white lusciousness—I'll fell him with a roll of modern manuscripts from his own prose-shop!"

"Explain the mystery; who and what are you talking about?"

"The youth I have sent for our meaty provender. A nice lad. He wears purple neckties, but means well. His name is Tomkins—I believe he spells it with a *y*, but I don't encourage the vanity. He does the brain-work for his employer, the publisher who lives on the ground-floor."

"Oh, yes. Meredith Macdermott. I've seen the name. Irish, I suppose."

"No, Scotch; but in spite of that, a good

fellow. Keen as axes, humorous too; wears an accent which gives life to his jokes. Publishes terrible stuff—calls it ‘tripe’ himself during the lunch-hour when even publishers unbend; but no matter—here’s the raw nourishment.”

Tomkins, a breathless, red lad, with a face which was only just a face, stumped in, dropped a lump of meat in newspaper wrapping on the table, and looked curiously at Hugh.

“Good lad!” cried Brook. “Just in time! Another seven seconds, T., and you’d have been doomed. Take the shekels. Bow-wow! Depart.”

T. took the shekels and departed.

“He thinks ‘bow-wow’ is wit,” Roderick explained. “It always fetches ’em.”

“You really can cook?” Hugh asked.

“Man, sit down and watch me. Cut bread; do anything; but do not doubt, dispute, or worry with flat words. I am an old campaigner, as I told you; one of the ever-victorious army. Beneath the rule of man, entirely great!—Oh, dash it! That old sloven hasn’t cleaned the frying-pan, drat her! There’s a job for Hugh—you, I mean, ugh! You needn’t use sand-paper for it.”

Hugh cleaned the pan under his tap—*the* tap—while Brook, smiling wisely, rested at his lengthiest length in the long lounge chair.

“Do it thoroughly,” said he. Hugh obeyed him. “Now put the steak in the pan, the pan on the stove, and watch it—watch it carefully—turn it from time to time, lest it burn.”

Hugh smiled to himself sadly. Roddy and

instinct told him what to do. He poked the meat with a fork, turned it about until he supposed it was done. It smelt good.

"Onions," said Brook, "we want onions; but being philosophers, we'll dispense with 'em. It would probably be beyond T.'s dignity to fetch onions."

Hugh dished the meat on to hot plates, set the table with a damask cloth, a present from his mother, put cutlery, glasses, bread and whisky thereupon, and called to Roderick to take the host's place.

Brook rose lazily, sat himself modestly at the foot of Hugh's table, and said with complacency,

"Never again will you say, I cannot cook!"

"Never again," Hugh echoed, while mentally he gasped.

"Never again will you depreciate my domestic endeavours!"

"Never again. Never, never again. But, while you are protesting, the banquet cools."

Brook talked shop while they ate. Hugh felt, for the first time in his experience, that he had earned his meal, that he was "one of them." Feast could never taste pleasanter or be more enjoyable than that of his own finding and preparing. He was pleased with himself because of his independence.

Roderick praised the meal heartily, and felt himself flattered. They parted for work again.

Just as Hugh, having written a letter to a Rotherhithe clergyman offering himself for certain evening-work, had settled down to his

table in readiness for another legal headache, a telegram came to him. It was brief, emphatic, characteristic.

"Aunt Maria disapproves—Cousin Elizabeth."

Hugh laughed aloud, thoughtfully rolled the paper into a ball, and threw it at a sparrow that cheeped on the parapet outside the open window.

"Bad shot," he said, "for Aunt Maria."

He set to work, encouraged by the telegram.

That petticoated potentate, Aunt Maria, would more sternly have disapproved had she known how Hugh spent the second evening of his liberty.

He went to a hall in Maiden Lane, where a husky lecturer talked red socialism most dogmatically. Hugh was greatly amused. This was the other side of the case with a vengeance. The violence of the orator—the words were gulped out in a fiery torrent—caused him to swerve more towards the ultra-conservative views of his father, than he had ever yet done. Well, it was only right and reasonable to hear the various sides of every question. The truth was somewhere in between.

He imagined the horror that would crown Cousin Elizabeth, and, forgetting his circumstances, burst into a laugh. At once, all eyes were upon him. He realised where he was; and felt shrivelled.

"Shut up! Chuck 'im out!" cried the militant near him.

"Let him be!" boomed the orator, as he fixed his burning, black, fanatical eyes on Hugh.

"We'll teach his lordship manners, we will, as well as social sense."

"I beg your pardon," said Hugh, uprising; and the audience, changing its mood on the moment, clapped.

His way of spending the following evening was hardly less reprehensible. He went into the sixpenny gallery of the Alhambra. His immediate neighbours were foreigners, who suggested the backways of Soho and Saffron Hill, and talked the languages of Babel.

He was seeing life from new aspects. He realised the multitudinous worlds within this wandering globe. His appetite for life was excited.

CHAPTER VII

CHORUS

AUNT MARIA was by no means the only person who disapproved of Hugh's adventure. There were rumblings of a similar thunder throughout the branches of the Family, even to distant cousinships. The relatives were all so orthodox in their manners and opinions: so obedient to the very letter of the laws and customs they had inherited for three generations; at any rate, since Aunt Maria was a serious girl. For Hugh to have such liberty as he now enjoyed, seemed to many of them a blatant invitation to the sowing of wild oats. And they said so, one to another.

It is very certain that Cousin Elizabeth took an extra and particular interest in Hugh's spiritual welfare. She felt herself Aunt Maria's vicegerent, and earnestly tried to live up to it. Possibly she coupled him, in her ecstasy of earnestness, with the Prodigal Son, and, in her mind's eye, saw him eating husks in the company of painted ladies. Her genuine fears were by no means Bowdlerised. Her imagination was horridly alive with other people's wickedness. She had not read improving books with impunity. Tracts, at best, are a morbid form of fiction.

Meanwhile, the Family talked and talked. They talked louder still when the opinion of Aunt Maria became generally known. The budget of letters which passed daily between them—letter-gossip was their prime recreation—grew bulky with protests, commiseration, comments innumerable, and inquiries. One or two which came to Mrs Arnold contained printed sermons. Only Aunt Harriet wrote sense—in her topsy-turvy manner. “Think of him as a young Crusader with a marshall’s staff in his knapsack!” she counselled.

This persecution of sympathy—for to such it amounted—made Sir Anthony fretful and touchy. He began to wonder whether he had done wisely in granting such criticised liberty, and came to think suspiciously of Hugh. He wrote him frequent letters in his best business-hand on the office note-paper, full of caution and advice. More than once, in these epistles, he seemed to assume that Hugh must go wrong, which galled the proud youth to the quick. Hugh read the letters attentively; smarted, and carefully put them by, docketing them after the methods of his father.

The Family talked, talked on, and paid each other increasing visits.

There was quite a small gathering one afternoon at the Dene, when the head of the Family was away at his offices in Copthall Avenue. All present were relatives, except two—Mr Truby and Mr Manners. They also, it was fondly believed by all but themselves, would belong to

the Family some day. It was evident that Alice had kindly eyes for them.

Mr Truby and Mr Manners were members of the spick-and-span brigade. They were followers of a model, their model being one of the very elegants of the musical-comedy stage. Their smooth hair shone. They wore their garments with that proper ease and careful negligence which only comes to the elect. Their hats were donned at the proper angle; the conduct of their canes was ever nice. They had qualities. They were good listeners, could never be bored; and, themselves, uttered the obvious brightly. They could not weary people with epigrams, and it always seemed as if they understood. Mrs Arnold liked them both—they were her sort, as Alice, using their language, said—and would have called them by their Christian names had the dear lady ever been quite sure which of them was Percy and which Cecil, or whether one of their names was not Harold.

They, the only outsiders now present, had lounged in after lunch, and stayed in the garden talking earnestly about golf-clubs with Alice, whom they seemed to admire; and so had been caught in the Family tide.

There were, besides these golden youths, some dozen aunts and cousins present; delicately feminine, all. Only one other man was there—Major Cromwell-Smith, who, finding himself in Sir Anthony's place as the masculine head and representative of the Family, rose to the opportunities of the occasion.

"Hoped Hugh would have been here!" he exclaimed. "I guessed he was up to something when last we saw him—eh, Harriet? Said so, I remember, at the lecture afterwards. Gad! The dulness of that lecture! I did not know modern science had become such drivel. He kept us—the lecturer did—he'd a head like an egg with the shell sprouting feathers—he kept us in the dark for hours and hours and showed us a procession of diagrams and monsters, enough to frighten the babes of my generation out of their wits. I haven't touched shell-fish since; and I was a fool over lobsters. In my young days, such evenings were improving—every 'ology had the curate's blessing—but now—now they are a debauch of demoralisation. But isn't it all a sign of the times? Egad! my dear Catherine, we are going to the dogs, double-speed, loud pedal pressed down. You can almost hear the future barking. England's hope"—he pulled contemplatively at his whisker—"began to shrivel when the crinoline shrank."

One or two of the ladies looked askance at this hyperbole. Not a few of the Family secretly believed the Major was incorrigibly indelicate.

"It was not so bad as the Major describes," his wife protested, with a tolerant smile on her lips. "Cromwell hates lantern-lectures because his fancy cannot rove, and, when all is in darkness except the screen, he has to attend to the subject."

"Tut, tut! We are wandering from the true path of inquiry. Hugh, Catherine, Hugh! How

is the interesting child, the golden youth so manfully sowing the seeds of his future in the muddy thoroughfares, our Galahad in spats? If he's half the man his father was at his age there will be a fine crop, believe me. Though in Tony's absence mum must be the word; and, ladies, you are not to imagine unpleasing things. Elizabeth, forgive me; you look better, you're growing plump."

The little spinster, who had been regarding the Major's remarks with eyes very severe, blushed at this final effort of his amazing effrontery with her palest pink, and was forced to utter protest.

"I think," she said, and saying it, seemed to come from her shell of meekness as a basilisk shoots from its den, "such levity is most unbecoming on this very serious occasion, when the whole of the Family is witnessing one of its most promising members in the presence of moral danger. Mr Smith,"—she disdained at that bitter moment to use his title. The Major felt the prick of her contempt—"Mr Smith is proving himself not one of our Family."

Mr Truby nudged Mr Manners, suggesting the inquiry, should they go? Mr Manners nudged an indefinite reply. They stayed because Elizabeth had resumed the thread of her indignant discourse.

"We are, all of us, feeling for you, dear Cousin Catherine, and in this place, at this solemn hour, levity is almost sacrilege. I had"—she groped in the reticule, her unfailing companion—"another letter from Aunt Maria only this

morning which was blotted and damp, I have no doubt with tears. Blotted and damp! Aunt Maria is one, who, as all of us—in the Family—know, is usually completely superior to the expression of any common emotion. She guards herself; steels herself; is strong. But in the general deep concern for one of ourselves in jeopardy, even she must shed the anxious tears!”

The feminine fringe and outworks shuddered sympathetically. Elizabeth had expressed their views and feelings.

The Major tugged at his whiskers, pursed his lips, played with his watch-guard, said “Tut, tut!” He listened the while attentively, with cloudy brow.

Having uttered these sentiments with almost a vindictive definiteness, Elizabeth shrank again into her shell of meekness, and forthwith trembled at her own temerity.

Betty seized a blotting-pad, and with hasty pencil scrawled down its ultimate words—transformed. It would go well from the lips of her heroine. “Water of anxiety” had about it a touch of imagination, too often lacking in her, as yet, not always impressive prose.

“Hugh is all right,” said his mother shortly. She hated this fuss; but knew not how to lead the conversation along its wonted tea-table channels.

“Ah!” exclaimed one other, with significance. She had white corkscrew side-curls and a nose all point.

The interjection roused the Major. He dismissed perplexity and resumed his ruling place.

"Come, come! There's no need for tears or sentimentality. All you said, Elizabeth, was quite proper and right; but Hugh is as sound as his father, and Tony's the straightest man breathing. Hugh, I can even say this, is as sound in his morals as I." The old boy's imagination again took fire and touched him to dangerous eloquence. "If London were as it was in my time, you might feel anxious then; but now it's governed by the schoolgirl with two plaits to her head. Lizzie, my dear"—Elizabeth shuddered and flashed fierceness—"if you were a sportswoman, I'd wager you a dozen of anything—gloves if you won; claret, if I did—that Hugh hasn't even thought of hanging round any stage-door, while in the old days, we—the Hebes—there was—but—but this I will say, Harriet, my dear, not one of 'em equalled you!"

At this there was a general insincere hush of agreement. More than one of the relatives was wishing the Major would be silent or go. Evidently, these were military manners.

His wife, Aunt Harriet, was the only person who appreciated his tirade. She knew her Cromwell in his mood of tea-cups and wagged her head at him archly. She enjoyed his impudence, while fearing for the havoc he made. The cloud of gloom evangelical that fogged the spirits of the rest of the company was evidently deepened and intensified by the Major's flashes. Mr Truby and Mr Manners felt that, in a way, this was no concern of theirs; but they evidently liked the idea of being merged within that Family,

and therefore remained, openly wearing the while an expression of elaborate inattention. Cousin Elizabeth, her lips pressed together, her nose sharp as a pin, looked her properest, like a watchful mouse on a gloomy day. The rest of the relatives were as mutes at the funeral of a reputation.

Mrs Arnold was burdened with many contrary emotions. Had she been severely cross-questioned—severely enough to rouse her—a kind cross-questioning would merely have brought answers agreeable to the cross-examiner, she would probably have declared that her son was in the right and doing the right; but the poor lady could no more resist the atmosphere generated by that disapproving crowd than she could lead them to discuss some topic less personal and depressing.

“I’m so sorry Anthony will have missed you,” she would say, in her earnest manner.

“Not at all, my dear,” the Major would answer. “Men must work, and women must talk; and the sooner to—er—how does the jingle go? You know it, Harriet, my love. That’s live poetry, Betty. If you can beat that, we may look for a poetess laureate; and why not? Why should a mere man have a monopoly of state payment for rhymed tosh? By the bye, it’s not original, on my part, is it? I did quote, didn’t I? If so, who wrote it?”

“Kinglake,” said Aunt Harriet, seriously. “I think he also wrote ‘The Psalm of Life.’”

The company was impressed. Betty puzzled

her brains. She could not be certain about the Kinglake; but surely "The Psalm of Life" was written by Longfellow, whose complete works she had in an imitation leather binding with rubricated type.

"Oh no! aunt. Longfellow, surely!"

"I think I'm right, dear. The poem begins 'Tell me not in mournful slumber.' That's the one I mean."

"It's wonderful," broke in her husband admiringly, "wonderful how Harriet always knows. Age — er, middle age — does not wither her passion for learning. Books and lectures, 'tis all one—her cranial crop's crammed; and still she has time and energy to henpeck me. Now, about Hugh!" The interest of the afternoon was brought back direct to its focus. "What's he doing, Catherine? Is he enjoying his flutter, or is he homesick for his mammy? Come, tell me now, and tell me true."

"He seems to be keeping cheerful," she answered quietly and submissively. "He was here on Saturday for a few hours. He's very busy; working too hard, I fear. He looked pale."

"The young, young dog!"

"Law studies are exacting," she explained.

"I should hope so!" His tone held significance.

"And he has taken to visiting the poor parts of London—the East-end. Hugh was always an earnest boy!"

"Takes after his dad!"

"He tramps through the slums—the terrible

things he told us! There are people there who have never seen a cornfield or the sea! We are just a little anxious that his health will keep good."

The fond mother, loyal to husband and son, having said much more than usually she would do, thereupon rang the bell for tea to be brought in; and immediately afterwards, in sudden housewifely concern, went to superintend its preparation. The questioning and explaining had agitated her nerves, making her restless.

This was Alice's opportunity.

"Father's anxiety is not for Hugh's health," she said significantly.

"No?—why?" asked eager voices. The hens were hound-like at once.

"He suspects, with reason, that Hugh is growing—Radical, and worse." She paused to allow her assertion to sink into their horrified minds. "He talked last Saturday about squalor and poverty and social reform, as if he were speaking from a parapet. We know he is mixing with all manner of people; and Mr Truby—this is Mr Truby—is certain he saw him on the top of an omnibus early last week, talking to a man in a cap."

"Well, it was a sort of cap," Mr Truby explained.

He was uncomfortable at finding his innocent testimony openly brought against Hugh. He believed in the trade-unionism of men, whose password is Mum.

"A workman's cap?" asked one.

"Had it a shiny peak?" asked another.

"Or was it plaid?" inquired a third.

"A cap in town!" exclaimed a fourth.

"It wasn't a hat anyhow," said Mr Truby frailly, as he played nervously with his cuffs.

"It doesn't matter what it wasn't," replied Alice, with the downrightness of superman.

"The men whom Hugh should know and consort with do not wear caps in town. That is logic. It concerns us all. Hugh owes a duty to us." She faintly echoed the intonation of her father's voice in his moments of declamation.

"We are the Family," she concluded.

She caught her reflection in a mirror, half-smiled in response to it, and smoothed an eyebrow.

"Caps!" began the Major, who was restless to intervene. He could take any text when he thought it gave opportunity to be tactful. "One more concession to slothful comfort! This is a despicable age; everything is sacrificed for ease. Caps! In the generations gone men showed they had backbones. How and why? Because clothes and headgear were dignified; and he who lolled or lounged did so to the ruin of clothes and headgear. That, too, is logic! Ergo! In the golden long-ago we did not lounge. Look at me! The straightness of my figure is not entirely due to corsets."

"Cromwell, Cromwell!" cried his wife, avid to the mental shiver which shook the cousinly crowd.

"My dear, they'll understand! In the generations gone we thought of appearances first, and

properly so. The man who respects his exterior shows he respects himself and other people. Why should we afflict our friends with aspects of sartorial unfitness? In the old days we were men. We hardened ourselves. We wore discomfort and looked elegant. But now, we are ever yielding to comfort and ease. Tush! Comfort is becoming a fetish. Life is growing a feather-bed business. Our youths will be lining their garments with cushions of air. We shall be dining in flannel fronts next. Things are growing desperate. We must rally! Mr Truby, Mr Manners, you, I, and others, we must rally round the white shirt-front. It is that or revolution! Caps! Norfolk jackets with dangling belts! knickerbockers! Bah! A silk hat is, and should be, one of our sacred emblems. Its very unnecessariness makes it a necessity. We, the gentry of England, must cling to it. It is the symbol and badge of rank. Abolish it, and where is masculine dignity? Our marriages, our funerals, without it, and its comrade, the frock-coat, would savour of flippancy. Parliament began to decay when the first bowler blackened its benches."

"What's he talking about?" suddenly shrilled Great-Aunt Selina, awaking from a doze. The old lady looked a hundred, and confessed to eighty-two.

"Hats! Hats! great-aunt," was shouted into her ear.

"Very misunderstood animals," was her comment.

"Yes, yes, great-aunt, yes."

She relapsed into the semi-sleep of senility.

The return of Mrs Arnold, followed by maids carrying tea-things, restored the company to just such geniality as had existed while the shortcomings of Hugh were matter for thought and talk.

A telegram was brought in, causing a flutter of attention. It proved to be from Sir Anthony.

The eyes of all in the wide circle were directed towards the orange envelope as Mrs Arnold, heart a-flutter, anxiously tore it open.

At once she breathed a sigh of relief, and read the missive aloud.

"Send bag packed by earliest passenger train to Cannon Street. Tom Secretan dying. Asked for me. Home soon as possible. Love."

"That means Cecily," said Alice, and the remark carried the Family attention away from Hugh.

"We ought to have asked her before," said Mrs Arnold, with plaintive earnestness. "We have forgotten her." The fact of such forgetfulness seriously troubled her. Cousin Elizabeth looked at her sympathetically, and one of the many maiden-cousins grasped her hand.

Thereupon, to the tinkle of tea-cups, the talk drifted about the personality of the Rev. Thomas Secretan, whom some few of the older ones present had known as a boy. There were tales of his wild young doings, wild according to the tameness of the tellers. They talked of

his approaching death with a sympathy that bordered on the cheerful.

But Hugh was not yet done with. As soon as Mrs Arnold was able to leave her guests to attend to the packing and despatch, by means of Travers, of her husband's bag, and to write an accompanying necessary unnecessary love-letter, full of fondness and advice about slippers and sheets, the ball of tepid denunciation of the Prodigal unprodigal reopened.

"We must reclaim him," said one and another, after a period of general vague lamentation and exclamations. "His poor, dear mother is not nearly strong enough for the task, and his dear father is so busy—so very busy. We must reclaim him, it is due to ourselves, the Family. We must help him. We!" How the reclamation was to be accomplished none of them knew; but all this sounded very well. "Think what Anthony *does*."

Most of the relatives had mental visions of Sir Anthony playing spillikens with ships and shares and money—the master-mind moving men—while shekels poured into his pocket—superior brain-pay.

"If only we *could*!" wailed one of them.

"But obstinacy is a mark of the tribe," cried Cousin Aminta, who carried about with her the memory of a love long lost. "Men are so obstinate."

"Hugh wouldn't budge from his pet ideas if we went down before him, all together, on our bended knees," Alice declared. There was a hum of resigned agreement.

"Brave fellow!" cried the Major, who, in his rôle of head of the Family, felt he had been audience long enough. "If he could resist that, he's got grit. And if he's got grit, as I believe he has—my good lady believes it too, don't you, Harriet?—he'll win through. I'm not going to despair of Hugh Arnold: not if you all went down on your beautiful bended knees to me, would I lose faith in the golden boy. We've confidence in him, even though there may be faint hearts among the petticoats—haven't we, Harriet, my dear?" Again he appealed to his wife.

"Yes," she said deliberately, and a trifle more loudly than need have been, as if she challenged the others. "Hugh is sound and true. He has his faults, so have all of us. Priggishness is no vice. If he's original, let him go his way. He is, in all that matters, plucky and true."

"Bravo, Aunt H.," cried Betty, a convert for the moment.

"Besides, you have heard he studies, and thereby marks himself apart from so many of the young. What is it the poet says—I forget which one it was; but the thought, not the man, is what matters—about departing and leaving behind us footprints on the burning deck?"

"Burning sands," Betty corrected.

"If only youth would read!"

"Ha!" cried the Major, "that's a hit at you," indicating in his blunt manner Truby and his fellow, who blushed and smiled lamely, while inwardly furious with him for drawing attention

to them in so depreciatory a manner. Their fury, at the worst, was gloved and lamb-like.

"No," his wife corrected. "I did not refer to them. I'm sure they are very nice boys." She beamed at them.

The nice boys liked this reference less. They were conscious—as was Alice—of being marriageable men.

"Well, even if you did so, you are forgiven, my dear. In my young days, we men of the future preferred to be buffeted, we were not coddled like puppy dogs in motor-veils, we——"

"Where is dear Cousin Catherine?" Elizabeth interrupted gently. With all her meekness, she had come positively to detest the Major; but he was not disconcerted. He beamed on her with placid eyes.

"In the generations gone, eh, Lizzie, young men were never lectured by women younger than their grandmothers. But nowadays, babies with hoops can harangue even uncles with impunity. Ah! in the olden, golden times, the sound of swishing—swishing, English verb, confoundedly active mood—could sometimes be heard on the breeze; but now—now! England is going, smoothly and rapidly to the pups. But, as has been gently asked, where's Catherine? Harriet, we must be going. I suppose you have some portentous lecture ready to tap this evening?"

"No, Cromwell. This evening, for the first time, I am going to read Shakespeare's *Faust*."

"Shakespeare's *Faust*!" interrupted Betty,

who, being literary, knew, and yearned to prove that she knew. "Shakespeare! he didn't write *Faust*, aunt; it was Goethe, Goethe." She pronounced the name something like Goth.

"My dear!" answered Aunt Harriet tolerantly, as she rose to go, "I know that Shakespeare wrote *Faust*—I know it well. It was Go-ethe who wrote the incidental music. Your uncle and I saw Mr Irving play in it. His legs impressed themselves on my mind."

"Your aunt always knows these things," said Old Loyalty.

Betty was flabbergasted. She hurried to the library in search of the collected works of William Shakespeare.

When she returned triumphant, the assembly had dissolved; its component parts had gone their several respectable ways. Mrs Arnold alone remained, alone was troubled, because of her forgetfulness of Cecily.

Betty sent her aunt a positive post-card.

CHAPTER VIII

CECILY

WHEN Cecily Armstrong arrived, she had every reason to feel welcome. The Arnolds, in reality, a most kind family, met her with extended arms. The mother took her to heart at once and kissed her as if she were a new daughter; while Sir Anthony fussed and blessed himself in his eagerness of emotion. He began any number of incompleted sentences, generally about Family-life.

Even Alice and Betty, despite their old intentions, welcomed her kindly. Tom held out a damp hand, blushed, and nodded shyly. Millicent stared stolidly and wondered if she had brought sweets. In their various way the Family were not unworthy of their traditions. Cousin Elizabeth was the only person who seemed cold and unsubdued. No freak of the imagination or ingenuity of argument could make Miss Armstrong any connection of hers; but still, in her own way, she fought with her shyness and tried to show Miss Armstrong warmth. Her "how-d'ye-do" was a sickly plant embedded in

apologies. At the back of her mind she slightly resented what she felt was an intrusion.

Sir Anthony was delighted with the good-feeling displayed by the Family.

"Worthy of England!" he afterwards declared. "Worthy of our best traditions! Which amongst other countries—which, I ask you—could equal it? In foreign lands, what is—home? With us it is a Sanctuary—a Sanctuary; with them it is—ah!——"

He looked out of the window in pleased abstractedness, allowing his words to drift into a dream; while he hummed, to no recognisable tune, something about pleasures and palaces, wherever we may roam.

After a few days, the novel interest of Cecily's coming had worn thin, and the sisters were inclined to be critical. In one respect, particularly, they found her wanting. Her aspect was not adequately funereal. She wore not an inch of crepe. Her clothes, indeed, were generally not black. She had a new coat and skirt of dark cloth, braided; but it was not mourning garb, and was far from being the right wear for a young woman so recently bereaved, especially as the sisters and all had learnt from their father that after Tom Secretan's death Cecily had been deeply affected.

Their criticism, after it had fed itself fully on this unwonted lapse, passed to the other things.

Alice blamed her for her readiness to play games with Tom. Heartlessness, she called it, and boisterousness. "She would laugh at a

coffin," she said, with a touch of acidity, to Cousin Elizabeth, who listened without pain.

Betty, after the first furies, was not inclined to continue so critical. She had the interests of her Work to broaden her sympathies ; but, still, was not so disinclined as she should have been, to throw verbal stones. The way Cecily did her hair, and the unfashionable simplicity and commonsense of her few dresses, were noted down and closely commented on.

"Unconventionality!" exclaimed Betty, who was a little jealous about her own artistic indifference to the conventions.

"Slovenliness!" cried the other. "I have no patience with people who do not care what the world wears. Mr Truby said that for two pins she would wear her hair in a plait."

"Mr Truby!" exclaimed Betty sardonically, causing Alice to look at her with a start.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, he—he would give much more than two pins for a smile from her beautiful eyes. I've seen him."

"Oh!" cried Alice with indignation, as furiously red she flounced out of the room. She felt that now she hated Betty as well as Cecily.

One effect of all this criticism was that Betty became more tidy. Anthony, often observant, when least expected to be so, noticed this development, and characteristically ascribed it to his own counsel and good words. He was an honest and a modest man ; but, even with perfect persons, there are limitations.

"There is one thing I can say of our children, mother," he declared one evening enthusiastically ; "yes, I think I still can include Hugh in this compliment. They mind what their father says to them."

"Of course they do, dear. Why should they not?"

"Well, I have observed—I go through life with my eyes open as most business-men must ; otherwise—ah—our chicks would not have quite so many good things and luxuries, perhaps—but, watching and noticing, as—ah—is my way, I have observed that, in other families, where the bonds of union and the national necessities of a linked home-life are not perhaps so fully recognised, the paternal, the parental, voice—how like those words are!—is not hearkened to as it should be ; and—mark this!—in those less happy and less hallowed spheres,"—his voice took on tragic tones as he raised a serious finger—"there is invariably discord, an inharmony which we cannot know ; and, eventually—ah—weakened, inevitably weakened, patriotism."

He walked nervously up and down the room, and rested to gaze with emotion at an engraving entitled, "Wedded."

"I think Cecily is happy with us," his wife said.

"She should be ; she should be. A nice child ! A bright and amiable girl ! Ah, my dear ; if you could have witnessed, as I did, her devotion to poor Tom, you would never forget it, as I shall never do. To see the old fellow, shrunk with

age and white—I should not have known him—lying on his pillow, with only his eyes alive, and shining with love, fixed on her face—well, it was better than many sermons : it was a sermon.”

“Yes, dear,” she murmured, to soothe him.

“Tom was a clergyman, a gentleman, a Conservative,” he slapped his right fist into the palm of his left hand, “that’s the best that can be said of any man. I don’t say he hadn’t his little vagaries, his views and his isms—I believe he had—but—! He loved that girl as a daughter, and she loved him. I could see it. It was no affectation. She simply adored him. I wished all the time you could have been there.”

She cooed again.

“It was a beautiful experience. I wouldn’t have missed it for a shipload of money. And while we were with him, and he was begging me, for old times’ sake, to be a friend to her, the choir and the congregation of his church gathered beside his window in the garden, and sang in chorus, hymns, softly and very sweetly. By George, it made me feel I’d missed a lot of goodness. I’m no musician, as you know—Alice didn’t get her musical talents from me ; I’ll say that for you, Katie—but when I heard those voices, singing the old words and melodies, well, I—I confess it, my heart seemed full of tears, my nose took a deal of blowing.”

“Anthony!”

“Yes, my dear ; but she didn’t move from him. She wiped his lips and forehead, and tended him, looked to his wants—Oh ! she is a fine girl,

is Cecily. We must look after her, mother ; we must make her one of our chicks, eh ? ”

“ I should like to, much. Perhaps it was as well we didn’t send for her sooner. ”

“ Perhaps it was. You needn’t fret about that, old lady ! I daresay it was. Yes, there’s a seeing Providence in the sky, whatever the—the mouthing blackguards may say. How they can shut their eyes to the divine, I—— ! ”

“ Yes, dear ! ”

“ Well, well ! In the morning of the second day, when Tom just slipped into death while asleep, that girl—she had hardly been out of the room the whole time I was with them—just kissed him and went into her own room quietly. Her lip was quivering. She could not look at me, I suppose. I could see her grief, but she shed not a tear. She shut her lips together and groped her way out ; and I—fool I !—could not say two words to comfort her. ”

“ I’m glad you went, Anthony ; and glad you brought her home. She shall be as a child to us. ”

“ My wife ! my dear ! ” He kissed her.

So it was settled.

But before a little while it was evident to the gods and to herself that Cecily Armstrong could not co-operate in the important business of doing nothing, which filled the greater part of the daughters’ time. She was restless. She wanted something definite and useful to do. In the Lincolnshire parish her hours and hands had always been fully occupied. There had been an infinite round of duties. She had helped her step-

father in his parochial work, visiting, nursing, teaching, tending; at the same time as she had looked after his home and personal comfort. She had been housekeeper and vicaress both. Now all required of her was to sit elegantly with empty hands and pass the hours of visitors with tea-cups and gossip.

She was not discontented, just the reverse. She had enjoyed the change and the rest; but her being, physical and spiritual, yearned for the strain and conflict of duties to be done, of difficulties to be encountered and conquered.

Her old Lincolnshire home, the village of Grangeton, had been scattered and sparsely populated. Its people, hard workers, were partly agricultural, partly mining. In their most prosperous condition they were but passing poor. They were independent folk with rough exteriors, slow-moving minds, and tongues untrained to courtliness. They had not been easy to get on with, or to influence; but Cecily did get on with them, and found interest and happiness in serving them. The greatest and most moving experience of her years had been the last, most unexpected one, of which Anthony had been witness, their tribute of song to the dying pastor. It had been to him and to her the perfect reward. The gift of singing was the redeeming possession of these rude folk; it softened the harshness of their lives. With their offering on the day of Tom Secretan's death, they sealed and settled almost a life-long debt.

And now she missed all that. Instead of

living among bleakness and barrenness, seeing and relieving the pressure of poverty on others, and the grinding power of want, which, in this way or in that, she might mitigate, she was expected to be happy, idling in exuberance of comfort, eating the lotus with appetite.

Mr and Mrs Arnold she came to revere. Experience did not lessen their charm. Their kindness seemed perfect to her who had known harshness. They were, in truth, too kind; for having been accustomed to fending and to fighting for others and herself, she missed the zest and strain of service which commanding duties bring. There was no self-consciousness, no posing, no discontent about this attitude and state of feeling; she had not a pose or a conceit about her. It was the natural restlessness of an energetic and capable individual in an atmosphere of complete comfort and idleness. She had been trained in a hard school. She had come to need the discipline of service. Work was essential if she was to be happy: and work that mattered was not available at the Dene.

Gradually she came to feel lonely. The girls had begun, quite unconsciously, to leave her out of the day's plans and reckonings; and, more than once, as they grew accustomed to her presence, treated her with thoughtless, sisterly sharpness of tongue. She began to lose confidence when she was with them. She hesitated to offer sympathies which might be misunderstood; and lost some of her natural frankness. It was hard for her to know when Alice would

find her welcome. With Betty it was easier ; but Betty had her Work ; and was even less to be disturbed than Alice.

With Cousin Elizabeth it was even more difficult than with the sisters. Cecily always felt restraint when in her company. She knew she was not "recognised" — that she was regarded as an interloper ; and that was enough to hamper and restrain her. Elizabeth's personality generally had a sort of atmospherical effect on those she hardly knew. It depressed. There were barriers about Elizabeth.

Cecily, after some days of waiting, hoping to be invited, determined to lower and remove those barriers.

Elizabeth seemed always to be working for some good and distant cause. She knitted, crocheted, sewed white garments for church sales and far-away heathens. She was a work-basket autocrat with mouse-coloured meekness ; and constantly looked at life through the eye of a needle.

Cecily tracked her to the library, and caught her sewing.

"I wish you would let me help you," she plucked up courage to say.

The spinster looked up. She was stitching little petticoats with remorseless thoroughness. She regarded Cecily sharply, as a bristly bunny might do, if white rabbits were cousins to porcupines. A gleam, as of antagonism, it may have been spiritual, but was probably only human, shone in her eyes.

"No, thank you, dear Miss Armstrong." Her voice was cold. Shyness, not unkindness, made it so.

"But, please, I can sew! I have done such work before. I had a great deal to do at Grangeton; and I should love to help you, please."

"I really could not trouble you, though I thank you." Elizabeth had spoken with faltering: she continued without hesitation. "This is a part of my mission. I could not share it with anyone. You do not know our Aunt Maria," she went on wistfully, "I wish you did!"

"I wish I did."

"She has said to me more than once, 'Elizabeth, you are not beautiful, you have no gifts or talents.' I'm aware of my deficiencies, Miss Armstrong. 'You are a woman of simplicity; your tastes are disciplined. What can you do?' she asked me."

Cecily stared. She was struck by the determined meekness of this little creature.

"Is this lady very old that she should adopt such a——?"

"Our Aunt Maria will never be old, and is always right, whatever she may say," Elizabeth eagerly broke in. There was reproof in the tone of the words. "'What can you do?' she asked me. Alas, Miss Armstrong, I am in many respects a poor creature. My sphere of usefulness is, I know, limited. What can I do?"

"But won't you let me——"

Elizabeth was not to be drawn from her

spiritual exercise, as she deemed it, of self-criticism. Cecily might have said nothing.

"I can hearken to good counsel. That is one thing. The world has need of obedient listeners. I can pray, Miss Armstrong,"—she said this with simple sincerity—"and work with my needles. Having considered the position carefully, having consulted in confidence a revered, dear friend in the ministry—such a good man, Miss Armstrong; but so misunderstood and, sad to say, persecuted—evangelists are generally misunderstood—I felt it my mission—he led me to the truth—to sew and to knit, not costly and ornamental things, but things which the poor may wear on their chests, and find warmth in. That is my mission. I must do my task alone." She fell to re-sewing with hurried energy. Then, as an afterthought, "Thank you very much," she said, "I am wasting time."

Cecily watched her for a moment, deeply disappointed; but still not devoid of the wish to help.

"May I not hem this sleeve?"

Elizabeth's answer was firm.

"My burden must be carried alone. I have had wise counsel from those who know my strength and my weakness, and that is my mission."

"Will you, then, help me to get some work to do?"

"You should seek counsel, Miss Armstrong, where I seek it. I am not qualified to advise."

More than once in the days thereafter, Cecily made essay to get within the confidence of that

poor, good body; but always was baffled. There is sometimes no resistance so effective as that of ever-yielding. It was not that Elizabeth was in any respect—in deed or in thought—unkind, but that she could not regard Cecily except as a passing stranger within the gates and was slave to a fetish. Aunt Maria was the predominant power behind her movements, intentions, wishes. She was a puppet, a marionette. No charm could lessen the spell of the distant lady's personality.

Cecily, unconsciously hungry for affection and weary of daylong idleness, drifted the nearer to Mrs Arnold; and, though always the dear creature was vague and self-suppressing, never found her wanting. Mrs Arnold made practically no positive demonstration, but was ever supremely good in a negative manner. This, of course, was something to help and to be treasured; but Cecily wanted work, opportunity, actual responsibility; her nature craved to be serviceable. Sir Anthony was blandly confident that all was well with her. What should she do?

Employment was the golden word.

She read the newspapers, studied advertisements, built ignorant dreams of wage-working endeavour. She thought of nursing, of a clerkship, of a post as governess. She spoke to none of the Arnolds yet about these intentions; but bided her time and desultorily studied sombre books. She learnt the names of the principal manufacturing towns of England, the chief rivers of Russia, the best-known gods of India, the

products of Central America, the possibilities of the Panama Canal, the economic definition of wealth, and lost herself in the mazes of the rule-of-three.

Only one person in and about the Dene made positive effort to cause Cecily's lot to be easier and happier. That was the elegant, but undesirable, Mr Truby—undesirable, of course, because of Alice.

Cecily had flown into his existence as visions, they say, fly into the mind of the poet. She had temporarily eclipsed Alice in the good youth's scheme of things.

Alice realised this soon enough; and though, hitherto, she had treated Mr Truby with such proper indifference as might be due to a swain of his pretensions, she was not prepared to part with his particular attentions, even temporarily. He came to the Dene even more frequently than in the old days, wore still more brilliant and elaborate socks, could not be satisfied with the knobs and hooked handles of his canes, so that the artist of the umbrella shop in St James's Street, with whom he dealt, began to feel that originality had reached the limits.

Cecily had no idea of the passion that trickled in the Truby breast. She was amused by the young men, listened to their tedious views of things with some curious, fresh interest, for Bond Street is several thousand miles away from Grangeton, and in the beginning their *blasé* impressions of life were somewhat new.

Mr Truby was smitten.

His devotion, with its divers effects, puzzled his comrade, Mr Manners, who hitherto had never known him to wander. His constancy to Alice had been a wonder to the satellite. It puzzled him so greatly that he ventured on speaking.

"Nice gel, that, awfully nice gel," he remarked.

"Yes, awfully, awfully nice."

"One of the righto sort."

"Yes, righto!"

"Jolly good looks too, and clever, why not?"

"Looks it."

"Got no money, I suppose? Poor as a cherub, eh?"

"Suppose so. Don't know. What is money?"

This opened up new ideas which were not developed.

"Well, she's an awfully nice gel, I'm sure."

"Yes, she is; an awfully nice gel."

"What's she going to do? Just hang about I suppose till Mr Wright comes along. What?"

"I suppose so. She's cleverish. She can talk."

"I thought she was a silent bird. She don't say much to me."

"Silent? not a bit. She asks good questions, searchin' questions. And she talks sense like a beastly book."

"By Jim! Does she. Cleverish gel."

"Yes, smart, and jolly, and cleverish."

"Well, here's wisdom, ol' chap. Take care! Miss Alice has a blue eye marked on you."

"Oh, that's all right. Alice is the right sort, my sort. So—so's the Armstrong."

"Ah, a nice gel; awfully nice gel."

"You're full o' truth, ol' chap; an awfully nice gel."

"Well, I must drift on. So long, ol' chap. I thought I'd sound you. I'll toddle round to the Dene to-morrow."

"Righto, ol' chap. I'll see you there. So long."

Thanks to this conversation, Mr Manners felt again somewhat at ease. Not so Alice. She was far too refined openly to give expression to her feelings, but what she thought of this development on the part of her long-tolerated adorer, would make poor language in print. She treated the faithless one with a careful coldness, which even the confidence inspired by costly clothing and the latest thing in canes, could not restore.

As to Cecily. Alice generally spoke kindly enough to her; but in the moments of her confidences with Betty, described their visitor as a blot on the chapter of their family life.

"She's a sly cat," said Betty. "Some day, I'll put her in a book. Then she'll squirm. She wants us to think she is a saint. She isn't!"

It was often a comfort to Betty to contemplate the punishment she would mete out, some day, through the opportunities for personalities of her books.

"Sly cat is the word," said Alice, vindictively. "I believe she's a suffragist. And what is more, I'm sure she was smoking a cigarette in the garden on Tuesday afternoon. Cousin Elizabeth

would be interested to hear that. I hate fast girls. I don't think she's good looking either. Her complexion is, I suppose, good and her eyes are passable ; but she doesn't show any taste in dress—in fact, she can't dress—and sometimes she strides, I'm sure, like a man. You mark my words, when she's forty she'll be a manly woman and talk base."

"I'm inclined to think that Cecil Truby——"

"Truby's an ass! and I'm not sure that her affected quietness is not a cover for fastness. There! If Cecil Truby does—he'll be sorry some day. Mark my words!"

CHAPTER IX

THE MAJOR EXULTS

It was more than a fortnight after Cecily's arrival before Hugh put in an appearance at the Dene.

He had fully settled down to the cares and excitements of the independent existence; and—let it be frankly realised—found these necessary home visits, in some respects, a *leetle* irksome.

He enjoyed being at the Dene; and, in the beginning of his residence at Stafford's Inn, had anticipated getting his greatest happiness from the periodical visits; but much water had passed under the bridges since then. His father's early fears, thanks to the careful inquiries of doubting relatives, had crystallised into suspicions; and Hugh was worried by the cross-examination, direct and indirect, to which he was habitually subjected. He came to feel as a home-returned prodigal son who had not known the privilege of being prodigal, and could not expect to enjoy the fatted calf.

It was a Saturday afternoon. On the way from the station ascending Chilston Hill, he came up with the Major.

“There you are, you rascal! Well, I’m glad to see you alone.” The old man patted his shoulder, and dug him in the ribs.

“Same to you, uncle.”

“I can’t say half what I want to in the circle of feminine relatives. Some of them—breathe it not in Gath!—are tabby-cats, with claws at the end of their caresses. I can whisper this to you without fear of your blabbing. Cousin Lizzie’s ears, I’m sure, yearn, yearn daily for something to shock them.”

“And you don’t disappoint her, Uncle Crom. We all blush for you sometimes.”

“Blush, my lad! That frozen woman—your Cousin Elizabeth, not mine, not mine!—acts on me as a moral magnet, a loadstone to verbal naughtiness. She is compact of virtuous microbes. She rouses my latent original sin. My tongue must be profligate—in a decent and pleasant manner, of course—whenever she is present. She is like a misprinted, smudged tract, indirectly inviting to vice. She spurs my flagging, verbal sinfulness. But, till we’re in her presence, we’ll forget her. For—aha!—I have a bit of social news to tickle the ears of the women-folk.”

He raised his hat; and, stopping, looked in pleased contemplation at the sky and the green branches above them.

“Aha!” There was fulness of typical joy in the interjection.

Hugh supplied the expected question. “What is it, uncle?”

"At Victoria Station to-day, who d'ye think I had a talk with? Who d'ye think gave me a lift in his carriage?"

"What mere man could have been so fortunate?"

"The Duke of Essex."

"Oh! only a duke."

"Wha—what! My boy, he's one of the old style. Rich as Croesus, blue-blooded as—as a beetroot; but with no more side than a milkman."

"Good for you!" There was a tinge of sarcasm in Hugh's voice. It was lost on the Major.

"Listen! I'd that moment arrived. My train was just in. I was wondering whether to walk or take a bus to Charing Cross—shank's pony or the steed of petrol—when a shabby little man, about to enter his carriage, beckoned to me—beckoned to *me*. I recognised him at once, I've a marvellous memory for faces. So had King Edward. Your aunt has often said—but never mind that! And the Duke must have known me, though only once we had met, at a Primrose League Reception, when, I remember, he had a damp hand. 'Which way?' said he. 'Charing Cross, your Grace,' I answered. The tact, my boy! I said 'Your Grace' at once, as easily as anything. 'May I have the pleasure?' he asked. It was nice of him, nice of him; wasn't it? We talked about policemen's boots. A pleasant man, simple, modest; but, between ourselves, only an average conversationalist. Dukes don't shine in everything, my boy!"

Hugh gave the Major a quick glance. He liked his relative, the old soldier.

"I expect that, in contrast, you shone," he said.

"Perhaps, lad." He brushed the suggestion airily aside. It may have been too obvious. "I talked of the aristocracy—the old kind, not the new. But, as you know, I am, on the whole, modest—modesty always was a military complaint. I was able to work in a nice compliment, but I doubt if his Grace saw it."

"Dukes are so careless!"

"Before we get to the Dene, tell me of yourself. I can't half question you there. How do the chimes sound at midnight, eh?"

"Oh, sleepily."

"Bosh! I was young once. I know! I heard 'em; and could have sworn they rang thirteen sometimes. Once I counted thirty-seven, and then I gave it up. Don't tell me you're a smug. Good Lord, spare me that! You're Tony's firstborn. He's got character. Ah! There are times when one's reckoning faculty is—enhanced. The old days! The old friends! But twelve o'clock is early—dooed early. Two is really the mystic time, the witching hour of night when men as well as churchyards yawn. But, after all, what can this generation know of life?"

"Life? We learn life through service." Hugh was a budding bore on some subjects. "We——"

"Pish! you pretend to be a lay sort of curate, and then get tucked in at ten, and have bread and milk and the *Sunday at Home* brought to

you in the morning? Bah! I've helped in my days, long-gone, to duck a policeman at three A.M. in the fountain of Trafalgar Square because he wouldn't sing "Little Binks" on his beat; and then been chased by a posse—posse, departed word!—to the other side of the Horseguards. Yes, we were bloods, blades, bucks in the dear, inimitable days. You might drop a hint of that to buxom Lizzie, will you? Her blush has the pickle-cabbage colour when she's really ratty; 'tis a sight for sore eyes! She loves to think me a reprobate—I, an innocent old soldier, with memories—and I doat on obliging a lady."

"I'd better tell her of the Duke. That would restore you to favour."

"Ah, well! It was an honour, my boy. There's no question about that! He's a duke of the true blue order, of the old aristocracy—yes, he's worthy of the generations gone. Very nice action it was on his Grace's part. Carriage and pair, cockaded footman, splashing turn-out, as perhaps Shakespeare said. But here we are at the hospitable doors of the Dene; blest residence of joy! There's that new sister of yours, Cecily Something. What d'ye think of her? Not seen her? Nice quiet girl, a worthy new niece for a military uncle. We are friends. As different from my virginal aversion as peach from prune. Ah, there you are, all of you! Harriet, my love! Tony! Catherine! All! I bring with me the husk-muncher. He's been telling me how virtuous he is, the artful dog. I'm afraid he's only a half-and-half reprobate, only a half-and-

half. I've been giving him sober avuncular advice; haven't I, Hugh? He's going to be dooced good, he's promised. Told him to go to bed with the chickens to avoid the night-air. Its shameful to greet the morning milk with a crush hat and a silly expression. Ah, Elizabeth, my lady bright. And how is your Auntie Maria?"

Elizabeth disdained to answer. Her thin lips were pressed together, a little tighter. She shrank a little more absolutely into the background; her mittened fingers crocheted the faster. That was the only proper treatment for the irritating Major. She noticed him by ignoring him. How she detested him!

Meanwhile Hugh was introduced to Cecily.

He wished he had visited the Dene earlier in the last fortnight.

They were in the garden. Tea was laid under the walnut-tree. It was a glorious blue day—possibly one of the original seven returned for the occasion—and all hearts were as light as individually they could be. Sir Anthony was very eloquent. Betty posed and talked her sort of epigram. Alice wore a new frock and looked delightful. Tom and Millicent ate.

The Major's tale of the ducal encounter was generally enjoyed. He told it with gusto. It went well. Hugh noticed that in the second version there was revision. The Duke, according to the later story, had greeted the Major by name; and, while shaking hands—still damp—had clapped him familiarly on the shoulder.

Aunt Harriet — Mrs Cromwell - Smith — was proud almost to happy tears at her husband's experience ; and began to see him, sworded, among the military great. Hugh, who once had played Poins in an amateur dramatic show, thought of Falstaff and the men in buckram.

At last, this prelude of entertainment palled ; and Hugh, watching his father, began to feel sensitive. He knew, with not one word yet said, that the annoying practice of commenting by innocent questions was about to begin.

Sir Anthony toyed with a tennis-racket, and looked occasionally, with eyes of cautious inquiry, at Hugh, who was explaining to his mother that the rooms in Stafford's Inn were well aired and thoroughly dry.

"And does this Mrs Stevens look after you properly ?"

"She is even too attentive, mother."

"Is she careful about the sheets ?"

"They are as clean as soap and scrubbing-brush can make them."

"And dry ? Have you ever known them damp ? A hot-water bottle, or an old-fashioned warming-pan——"

"I am most careful about them, mother, and everything of the kind, because you wish it. The sheets are never damp." This plain, practical, prosaic catechism struck him as very ludicrous, made him laugh within.

"Does Mrs Stevens do it all herself ?"

"Generally, yes ; but she has a daughter who sometimes helps."

"A daughter? A decent girl?"

"I think so. I've only seen her once or twice; and then I didn't particularly notice her. She brought the clean linen; she seems quite all right. She speaks with a cockney accent, that I know."

"And the husband, the father, Stevens?"

"I don't know whether there is one or not. I've never seen him. Perhaps she's a widow. She looks cheery enough."

"Cheery, my boy?" interrupted Sir Anthony, with a momentary cloud in his eye.

"Roddy Brook tells me that laundress's husbands, like lodging-housekeeper's husbands, are always somewhere, cyphers. They don't live: they exist." Hugh went on, tempted to be mildly shocking, and determined if he could to keep the talk from himself.

"They always were, even in my day," commented the Major. "I have suffered much—much—from landladies' husbands."

"Well, Hugh, my dear," remarked the careful mother, "I feel happier now. I think I will go and see Mrs Stevens some day—I'll call in the morning when she's at your rooms—and talk to her. Damp sheets are the things particularly to guard against. People take such chances. You will be careful, won't you?"

Sir Anthony, who had listened to this domestic dialogue with one of his ears—the other had been umpiring the bubbling discourse with which Major Cromwell-Smith was entertaining Alice—

now intervened. He gently tapped the toe of his white garden-shoe with the face of the racquet.

"Damp sheets are not the only things, mother. Hugh, as our son, has serious responsibilities as well."

"Of course, dear!" she said.

Cecily, feeling the conversation might become too personal, rose to wander away among the fruit-trees. Alice went with her. The dear girl twined her arm affectionately around the visitor's waist. They made a pretty picture, Alice in her blue and white frock, all airy, and lacy, and filmy, and frilled, knew she found an excellent foil in the sober dark of Cecily's costume. Sir Anthony watched the picture the dear girls made, and was touched and pleased by it.

"I'm not forgetting them, father. Can't we—can't we make up a set, or do something all together and be jolly?"

"Presently my boy, we will. I am a believer in general games. It is good for the members of a Family to be playmates. It knits the fibre. The Empire—ah—it may be said to rest—to be broadly based—on the gardens, even the back-yards where the multitude play. But you are our boy, our heir; and we—your mother and I—think of you a great deal and we talk of you; don't we, mother?"

She smiled on the father and then on the son.

"Hugh knows that we do."

"You are both good, awfully kind—" he began, still hoping to escape.

"And we're not anxious, Hugh; remember that!" Anthony for the moment laid a kind hand on his shoulder. "You have our absolute confidence. But—well, we like to know how you're getting on, and what you're doing. Now the Law—how's the reading going?"

"I'm—I'm still reading."

"Regularly?"

"Yes, I think so."

"And eating the dinners, eh?"

"Yes, as little as I must."

"And making acquaintance with useful friends?"

"Well, I'm not going to marry an attorney's daughter."

"Oh, ah, good; very good! That was humour, mother."

"I'm glad," said she, beaming again on her boy, whose ways and words were so often beyond her.

"But you do make friends, don't you, Hugh; among men of mark, I mean? Barristers, and so on. It is most useful, necessary."

"Well, father, I do make friends; but really —" Hugh turned of the sudden pale and impatient. This everlasting questioning had become intolerable. "You must forgive me. They are friends; and being friends, I don't care twopence—I can't care—whether they are likely to be useful or not. You must trust me, father. Let me judge for myself. I don't want to seem a churl, or to be one; but I do wish to find my own way, please, I must!"

His shoulders shook with nervous weariness.

"I'm afraid you're headstrong, Hugh." Sir Anthony was mightily offended.

"No, father—well, perhaps I am ; I don't know. I don't want to be ; but I want to find my own way ; I must, I must—without leading strings ; as I said before you let me go. That was awfully decent of you, father, and generous. I wish—I beg you, don't keep cross-examining, and for ever doubting me. It is discouraging. Let me try by myself ; do trust me, and if I fail, I fail alone. If I do then—then blame me. Do you see?"

Sir Anthony rose, solemnly and with stateliness, from his garden-chair. His face wore the shadow of a frown.

"I am not satisfied," he said slowly. "Let me correct what I said before. I am, at times, anxious ; we both are sometimes anxious, though—yes, we have confidence, too, generally. We must be concerned about the—ah—greater things. Damp sheets, mother, are nothing to be anxious about—nothing ; but duty, decency, resolution, and the sense of responsibility—ah!"

Hugh's face fell hopelessly—he felt rebuked, discouraged, ashamed—as his father turned and moved towards the Major, now talking archly with Alice and Cecily. Mrs Arnold at once leaned across and whispered.

"The sheets are very important, Hugh. You must remember. But father's right, very right, too!"

"Come, my boy, let us make up a set," cried Sir Anthony, in a loud and tolerant voice.

"And your underclothing, too, remember!" said his mother. "Now go and play with father; and be very pleasant, dear."

CHAPTER X

CONFIDENCES

THE middle of July came; and the Family, Cecily with them, went to Folkestone for two months.

Hugh, as the Long Vacation had begun, and the law's excitements palled—even as pantomimes do—joined them after they had been in residence some three weeks. His mother had insisted on the change, and he had eagerly obeyed.

The Major and Mrs Cromwell-Smith put up at a temperance hotel on the Lees; and, the expected easily happening, Mr Truby and Mr Manners found that they too needed a sea-change. So they arrived.

Their unconquerable elegance had taken on nautical touches. They always managed to be in the picture, and dressed to suit their environment. On the moors, they would have worn heather-coloured neckties. At Folkestone they looked as if they owned motor-boats, and could navigate the pier.

To the general regret and relief, Cousin Elizabeth had returned to Aunt Maria. She

felt it her mission to refuse the offered holiday ; but, none the less, seemed humanly sorry not to be going with them.

"Dear Cousin Catherine, dear Cousin Anthony, I shall think of you all—all!" She went out of her way to present Cecily with a crochet-hook.

Sir Anthony was never so happy, or shone with such unaffected geniality, as during his annual holiday. Although, for some days of every week, he insisted on visiting Copthall Avenue, for he was convinced the wheels of finance would stop if he took an uninterrupted holiday, he was, for the nonce, a sort of pompous play-boy, and grew proud of a complexion which wavered between nut-brown and the red of beef. He even appeared to forget his smouldering doubts of Hugh. He joked with less difficulty than usual; and if his own laughter was his first reward, it was no less acceptable for that. He rollicked resolutely, and felt he was doing good to himself and to others; as he was.

Mrs Cromwell-Smith spent much of the holiday with mental profit. Text-book in hand, she searched, even passionately, for fossils at the Warren; while the Major, armed with a geological hammer, slept in the shadow of the rocks. He approved his wife's efforts in the pursuit of science, and declared the scenery of Weir Bay to out-Switzer Switzerland—where he had never been.

"Give me Nature!" he would declare expan-

sively — “the sky, the flowers, the sea — no jerry-building there.” The declaration done, he would toddle off contentedly to the nearest opportunity for securing some horrid modern cocktail. “A detestable drink,” was his judgment, as he smacked his lips.

They were a happy family party. Aunt Maria, and the greater concerns of existence, seemed to diminish in seriousness wonderfully as the play-weeks passed. Not that the influence of the great relative was actually any the less ponderous. Cousin Elizabeth was too loyal for that. The superlative lady’s opinions on things, from hairpins to thunder-clouds, were faithfully reported for the delectation and the benefit of the faithful. Aunt Maria was still a power ; but, somehow, distance did lend some enchantments to the prospect. She did not seem to matter quite so much when sixty more miles stretched between her and them at Folkestone.

Cecily began to regard Hugh with better sympathy. Her first impressions of him had not been favourable. They had, perhaps, been coloured by the inconsequent, and sometimes barely kindly, comments, falling for ever from the relatives’ questioning lips. Unconsciously, she had absorbed a prejudice, and was inclined to think him, what he was, a prig. He had certainly less of the Arnold lip, she noticed.

For his part he found her unquestionably attractive. He analysed her qualities. She had, he decided, charm, which seemed enhanced by her aloofness, so far as concerned him. Was

she beautiful? No. What was the use of beauty? She had character, ability, kindness. Her face possessed expression. The rest was only leather and prunella, so to speak. He was not sure of that hyperbole.

One morning before breakfast he resumed his boyish exercise of verse-making.

“Her eyes are stars of hazel hue.”

That was as far as he got. Thoughts of her manifold perfections so jostled him, that, amid essaying and dreaming, he could not find a sufficient second line; then the breakfast-gong rioted.

A summer holiday is, however, a fine occasion for clearing away prejudices and promoting illusions.

They were walking in the lanes beyond Hythe. Cecily and Hugh, in advance of the others, and unconsciously stepping out with energy, out-distanced them. They came to the hills.

The hedgerows were laden heavily with honeysuckle. Its scent sweetened the exhilarating air. A warm breeze, travelling seawards, caused them to be glad at intervals to rest.

They sat on a green slope and watched the view of stretching countryside, with the glint of sea beyond. A little white cottage, backed by trees, shimmered like a star in the sun-blaze.

“It is good to be alive,” said Hugh, in ecstasy of living.

Cecily, under the shadow of her large hat,

quietly contemplated him. His face was glowing. He seemed happy enough. She decided that she liked his companionship.

"Are you always consciously glad of life?" she asked.

He gazed at her thoughtfully.

"No, I'm hanged if I am!"

The question challenged him; he was prompted to express himself, to outpour something of his aspirations, to win from her the sympathy he needed, which seemed not available from the others.

She smiled to herself. Seeing this he checked his revelations.

"Who would be?" he said. "Life is such a tangled business. There are times—yellow days, muggy days, when the south-west wind is damp—when I have the dumps; but so has everyone, I suppose."

"Not everyone. It depends on the individual. You are, perhaps, unduly mercurial, have the artistic temperament, as the neurotic call it, when they feel extra sympathetic towards themselves."

He made a grimace. This frank speech was medicine. He rather liked it—from her.

"Perhaps I am—what you say. I certainly feel gloomy enough sometimes. It's when I'm tired, and London gets exhausting."

"Then why don't you, at such times, run away home? They would always be glad to see you. I've heard them talk about you. It would do both you and them good. Half an hour in the train——"

"I often think of doing so ; but I have a great deal to do which I think is useful. Besides, it sounds beastly, no doubt it is beastly mean of me ; but home has become discouraging."

"Discouraging?" She puzzled for the moment for his meaning.

"Oh, I can't tell you."

"Yes, you can, if you will. I'm really interested."

"It's rather like putting at my own people."

"I shall understand."

"Will you? Well." He paused to order his thoughts. "They're the kindest people in the world. But they, following my father's firm and oft-repeated opinions, think life is ruled by conventions. Ten commandments aren't enough. Modern Society needs a thousand and ten, and frequently breaks those that chiefly matter. I know it's all wrong."

"Not all wrong," corrected Cecily.

"Well, often wrong. My father is the finest man breathing. That's just the truth. He's full of ideals, conventional ideals. He'd die for duty. He's proud of his wealth ; but he'd give his last penny to a cause he believed in, if it needed it—especially if it was Church of England. Certainly, he'd suffer tortures rather than hurt his good name or injure any member of the Family, or anyone else who wasn't too blatantly radical. But rules and conventions devitalise. They're right for some people, not for others."

"Not for you!"

"Not for me. I'm not built on his pattern. That's what he is, a pattern. I'm not. My fault, I daresay; but I won't be a humbug, and say I recognise it as my fault. Anyhow, there it is; I seem to have grown gradually into a spirit of revolt against the iron, inelastic regulations which bind so many men. You see it everywhere. There are as many Pharisees as ever; and there is no end to the shallow people. How many of those who sing the Magnificat, think of its true and full meaning?"

"You are rather wandering, aren't you!" said Cecily, smiling. He was too much in earnest to notice the remark.

"Since I've been in town, I've seen people roughing it under unheard of, impossible conditions; and I know there are many truly godly men who never sit in a pew, and many a gentleman, crude of speech, possibly, who hasn't a handkerchief in his pocket or a collar round his neck."

"Of course!"

"And not a few of the pew-holders, all over London, are sweaters, false tradesmen, bucket-shop keepers, rack-renters, bookmakers, fraudulent money-lenders."

"Very likely, but that's no reason for you to revolt. You can remain at home, live the family life, and still work out your intentions and do generally as you wish."

"No, I can't! That's just the trouble. I cannot. My father will not realise that I'm grown-up, twenty-five, callow no longer. He

wants me to do as I'm told and no more. I may not think for myself. He'll not allow me to have a will and rights of my own. I want to know a little more truly why there is all this unspeakable rottenness in the world, and to do my bit towards removing it."

There was challenge in his voice. He paused and looked thoughtfully at the glowing girl beside him. Glowing was the true word; for Cecily's hazel eyes were alight with sympathy and interest.

She charmed him, charmed him inexpressibly. She was the nearest approach to his idea of the wonder-woman he had yet met. Her frankness of look and speech; her vigour, forthrightness, freedom from affectation, her healthy common-sense and pithy way of stating her opinions, set her, in his views, splendidly apart from, splendidly above, the pretty dears, the daintily helpless girls, the damsel-delights in fluff, feathers, and muslin, whom he mostly met, and whose main interests in life were love with a small *l*, dances, kisses, and wedding-cakes. Such as they he knew well, very well. Such as she had not crossed his ways till now.

He was greatly glad he had met her.

"Quixote! Don Quixote!" she said. "You are tilting at windmills and battling with the sheep. What was the end of the Don's ambitions?"

"Not failure. To call me Quixote is really too great a compliment. Cervantes gave his book an ending that suited the conventionalists;

but when all is said and done, the Don remains the type of a most true, self-sacrificing gentleman. He was absolutely unselfish, and ready always to do battle with real and imaginary monsters, and to champion the oppressed. He wasted many a good effort, no doubt ; but not all of his efforts were wasted ; and actually, as well as in intention, he helped."

Cecily, noting the enthusiasm in his eyes, which shone with energy, thought something less of Hugh's priggishness and something more of his ideals.

"The Don and his methods are not for this day," she remarked.

"I'm not so sure of that : we need a few Quixotes ; but, at any rate, ideals are always necessary."

"Yes ; but practical things, prosaic, practical things, are far more necessary. No dream will fill an oven ; and it's poor use talking of ideals to people whose cupboards are to remain bare. The old women of Grangeton, whom I used to know very well, laid greater store by the soups and flannel I took them—little as there was at the best of times—than by all the pretty-pretty things I tried to say."

"There are always mercenary self-seekers ready to exploit kindness."

"No ; don't misunderstand me. These old ladies gave me something better than cupboard love. But it was the realities that helped them."

"They were old. That makes the difference. Youth needs the ideals."

"Of course it does : and so does age. I will say nothing against idealists. . . . I knew one."

Both stared thoughtfully at the landscape, and saw of it nothing.

"Well, Cecily, I may be a fool, and mistaken, and going to be kicked for my pains—I always recognise the possibility of that—but that won't prevent my trying to do something before I am dead. We only have one life, and plaguey little experience to start with ; we are entitled to make some mistakes. So whatever may be said of me, whatever the cost be, I'm going to do my work my way. *Voilà!*"

He answered with a note of mock-bravado, laughing at his own enthusiasm. She smiled in sympathy ; but to herself confessed that these Arnolds were a curious family.

Hugh took hold of his stick, as if about to rise and resume the journey ; but as she showed no signs of moving, and seemed very thoughtful, he let it lie, and after some time of silence continued his confidences. It was a relief to have someone to talk to. The accumulation of ideas and of emotion was surging to be released.

"There is so much to do ! No one can stand still. The slums ! The mean streets ! The ugly, crowded places of London ! How can people live amongst them and not become mean ! These months I've gone almost daily, at all hours, though generally in the evening, to the slum parts of north, south, east, and west London—all parts have slums. Everywhere there is squalor, misery, ugliness—unspeakable !

It's the children that matter. It's the children who suffer! The grown people have—or have not had—their chances. Anyhow, it's too late to reform them; and they might get out of it if they liked; but the children can't, they can't. They are born to know nothing but that crabbed life. Any number of them waste away. They are generally born healthy enough; but ill-feeding and bad air make them pine and complain. The mothers and their gossips say, 'Poor little dear. It cannot live!' and so it dies. London in all parts is packed with similar tragedies. The waste of infant life is enormous. Ignorance is the new Moloch. Yes, it is the children that matter. As for the parents! You see them often utterly careless, indifferent, vicious, drunken; but, my word! seeing their circumstances, environment, they've got some excuse." He spoke out, and with his stick whacked the ground. His eyes blazed. "I'm going to do something to help. I'll swear to that."

"But how? how? That is the question, how?" Cecily asked, very quietly.

"I don't know. It's a thorny subject. It wants study, observation, organisation, order. The question, I realise, is as difficult as any question can be. But it is there; it has got to be faced. It can be fought by the idealists and practical together; but the idealists must lead. You know what it is Blake said?—That is my motto—'I will not cease.' The lines are in danger of being hackneyed."

She took up the quotation at once. She had learnt the words from her stepfather, who had been an idealist in the shadows.

The two were thoughtful for some few minutes thereafter. They gazed on the green landscape, brilliantly lighted by the summer sun, and kept their separate dreams.

Hugh's thoughts, through the sheer contrast of circumstances, were with the miserable in the slums. Cecily, knowing something of life's harshnesses from the bleak, unsheltered flats of Lincolnshire, enjoyed the present in that breeze-swept, green, and very pleasant land. To both of them the wind among the trees, the vivid verdant earth, the sounds that reached them of men and nature at work, were facts, glorious, spiritual, refreshing.

"It's the children that matter," Hugh repeated. It was again the conclusion of his theme of thought.

Cecily turned to look at him with illumined eyes.

"Yes, always," she agreed; "but even with them, helpless as they are, much haste may mean less speed. After all, a great deal, some say too much, is being done for them."

"No, no!"

"I'm afraid so. The difficulty is really to help the children without diminishing the parents' responsibility."

"Oh, dear!" cried Hugh, with a mock gesture of despair. "That's what the lukewarm gentlemen—grannies, all say."

"Lukewarmness, according to the wild reformer, is only another name for very necessary caution." Hugh stared. His experience of pretty girls had hardly suggested this confident sort of reasoning. "I know—I know," she repeated with emphasis, "that real harm can be done by hurried kindness, because I've done it."

"You have?" He laughed.

"I have. I was, as far as a woman is permitted to be, almost my stepfather's curate, his almoner, district visitor, deaconess, and many things beside. We had often to act rapidly in Grangeton; sometimes, in consequence, I made mistakes. There are plenty of pious frauds, especially in simple villages. They kept their eyes on the soup and blankets, did the dear old humbugs. But, of course, cold indifference is worse than any form of mistaken generosity."

"I should think it is!" Hugh felt sententious. "The cautious creature who habitually refrains from doing a necessary act because it's against the rules; the person who eats, drinks, dies, and doesn't care a brass dessert-spoon for anybody else during his greedy lifetime, is loathsome, loathsome; one of life's parasites. Of course, both extremes are mischievous. The thing is to strike the happy medium between progress and carefulness."

"That is just true. So, physician, if you please, will you heal thyself!"

She smiled; but he was looking down and pulling at the short, crisp, shining grass: he did not notice her.

"I will if I can. But, by George, if a piece of quixotism seems the right thing to do, I'll do it. You see if I don't!"

"I think I wouldn't if I were you. Courage and chivalry are splendid virtues; but you can't act without your fellows, and the world generally thinks quixotism cranky. At the best of times, the well-meaning crank is the worst sort of brake on a machine when it comes to progress."

"Oh, don't you be on the side of the enemy!" he urged.

"I'm not! I'm not! I'd like to help you in your practical schemes."

"Oh, good! then you'll let me talk things over with you, now and then?"

"Gladly. Indeed, I will."

"And you'll tell me candidly when I'm on the wrong tack."

"I will! Candour is one of my complaints."

"Alice—" he began; and then he stopped as he felt it was difficult to refer to Alice in connection with Cecily's candour.

"Poor Alice!" she took him up and laughed.

He went back to the previous subject.

"It's a great thing having someone to make one's confessor."

He offered the right hand of comradeship, which she accepted.

"Now it is my turn," she said. "You can help me with advice."

"Why, what can you want my advice for? What's the matter with you?"

She laughed. It was a tribute to his egoism.

"So like a man! What I want is not much, and yet is a very great deal. I want to earn my living."

Hugh stared at her.

"How?" was all he could say.

She did not share his hesitancy.

"That's for you to help me to find out. I'd like the advice of—one of our social reformers."

"No chaff, please, Cecily!"

"All right, Hugh. I'll be serious. This is the point—I cannot and will not live on your people much longer. They are awfully good to me; but I want to keep myself. I have hands and brains, and want to use them. There is no reason in the world why I should not keep myself: and I will."

"Splendid!" he cried, again whacking the ground with his stick in his enthusiastic manner. "I know your feeling. I admire your intention. I'll help you all I can. What do you think of doing? There is nursing?"

"Yes; nursing or a clerkship. I won't be a governess or a companion. That I'm quite clear about. I have rather large hands for children; and I have such a bad temper when I'm with people who are similarly blessed."

"Don't be a shorthand-typist. The life is horribly stodgy."

"So is most work done for others, when it comes to that; and—it's a great deal better than for ever eating other people's bread. Your counsel has helped me."

"Don't!"

"I will learn shorthand and typewriting. I

have a few pounds, my inheritance. If your father will let me——”

“Oh, he'll let you right enough. He'll admire your spirit, as I do. Perhaps he'd give you work at his office in Copthall Avenue.”

“No, that wouldn't do. He's too kind-hearted. He couldn't rebuke or blame me if I did wrong, as, of course, he ought to do. I don't think it would do for me to be in his employ.”

“Oh, don't put it like that!”

“Why not? What stuff!” She looked at him attentively, and then felt justified in further frankness. “You are a bit of an ass, Hugh; aren't you?”

“Of course I am!” He laughed. “Well, we'll say nothing more about it. I'll make inquiries where to learn shorthand and so on. Oh, there's the College in Moorfields where I've been going to debates. They teach all sorts of things jolly well. A dingy but efficient institution. I'll call there when I get back. The secretary knows me by sight. Next term he'll be telling me funny stories. Anyhow we're pals, you and I, aren't we?”

“We are; and our watchword shall be candour. So that if I call you—what I sometimes think you are—you'll believe my opinion is at any rate sincere.”

“Confound it! I will.”

So they made compact and resumed the homeward way.

It was a significant hour and dear to both of them. Each was exulting inwardly.

The song of life was being sung lustily in their hearts. Doubtless, there was trouble ahead for both of them, as in this mortal life is bound to be ; but in that hour of youth, all the world and the future was promising and golden.

So, perfectly drew to its close their most perfect of days.

CHAPTER XI

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

THEY were sitting at picnic on the heights near Cæsar's Camp.

The Major, lounging easily, his head adorned with a pith helmet and puggaree, enjoyed and disturbed the silence of the hills. It was picnic weather. The spirits of the party were full of ozone. There were japes, jokes, and jollities. Being holiday humour, it was tolerable.

"All the cheap humorists despise hair," cried the Major, in unchallenged self-defence; "but England's honour—remember that!—was saved by a be-whiskered soldiery; Havelock, Raglan, Colin Campbell, Nicholson; bearded or be-whiskered every blessed one of them."

"Wellington, Bonaparte, Washington," was murmured.

"They'd have done better bearded! You disturb me, Hugh, and indirectly illustrate the argument. "In the old times, youth, callow youth, listened to its elders, and, egad, was respectful. The switch and the cane were institutions then; and by George, the tune they

went to made of us men. Isn't it so, Tony? What!"

"It is so, Major. But I—I did not need to be switched."

"Doubtless. But I did. Hence my super-quality. Ha! But things have changed. Change and decay in all around I see. Sad changes, some! We live in hairless days, when to look as like an actor with narrow jaws and face of paste, seems the ideal of young knighthood; and to be smooth-cheeked, smooth-tongued, smug and disrespectful, the expected proper thing. Bah! It makes one tottery!"

"Forgive me, uncle, for having intervened; but interruptions are good for you. They inspire you." Thus Hugh, with some diplomacy, strove to gather peace.

"Your uncle is quite inspired enough," said Mrs Cromwell-Smith, severely. "If only he would read more books, as well as the *Times*, and that pink paper which he calls the *Primrose League Gazette*—it seems to amuse him—I did not know horticultural books were particularly funny—he would——"

"Say no more, Harriet. Cease, fond Woman, cease thy strife! as somebody has somewhere said—you read it to me, I know—I am well satisfied with the intellectual food, the mental pabulum on which I browse. But to hark back to the rise of the curtain."

"Go on, Cromwell!" said Sir Anthony, with a loud mock-sigh.

"I intend to! I was talking of things hirsute.

I firmly believe righteousness of mind is particularly associated with hirsute luxuriance. I had curls when I was a young blade. Remember Samson! I have always felt that the inspiration of Scripture was proved by the incident of Delilah. No common writer, or uninspired buck could have struck on that luminous idea of the potency of hair. It is true, I know it; and I wear—weepers.” He fingered them with such an air of proprietorial pride that Sir Anthony felt his example had been comparatively well imitated!

Mr Truby and Mr Manners, shiny and clean-shaven both, had listened to this discourse with blank, but not evident, amazement. One of them, keen-minded as usual, turned the Major’s ideas into another channel, and the other supported his efforts.

“Simply adorable day, adorable weather; adorable!” he said.

“Yes, awfully nice day,” chimed in the other.

“Cloud or two in the sky,” said the one.

“Jolly little clouds!” said the other.

Having thus changed the conversation, the two youthful sages devoted their attention to Cecily, who struggled with the iron crust of a pigeon-pie, while Alice, her eyes in the shadow of a wide sun-hat, watched them keenly. Her mind was storing sinister impressions.

“Perfect!” exclaimed Sir Anthony, as he gazed at a skylark scaling the blue heights. “I really am glad I did not go to town this morning. We are a fortunate Family.” The way he said this implied, or, perhaps, would have suggested

to a cynic, the idea that the enjoyable weather was a special dispensation to the Arnolds; and that if the head of the Family had been compelled to go to London, there would have been clouds and rain.

"Even the clerk of the weather has changed with these times," continued the Major. "As the Duke, I remember, said to me, 'Major, it is muggy.' Nowadays it is always muggy in December. In the generations gone we had winters which would have frozen the marrow of your bones. Now you get a little mild snow sometime in June, while the winter wild, as someone called it recently; who was it, Harriet?—I really am full of quotations, though dooce knows where I get 'em!—You read it from a poetry book with a broken back, my dear."

"A broken back? Ah, then, it was Mr Milton."

"A Radical, a Republican, a Puritan," said Sir Anthony, frowning.

"An artist," exclaimed Betty self-consciously, pushing back her hair, appropriately luxuriant.

"Oh, I daresay he was not so bad, considering," the Major conceded, "though nowadays I expect he'd be unspeakable. I have no prejudice against the merely dead. They did their best. What I do ask for, whenever I can, is preservation from the crudely new."

"Ha!" cried Anthony, after he had refreshed himself with a deep, deep draught of shandy-gaff, his holiday drink, which at home or in

town he would not have touched, even in a golden tankard. "Ha!" He was amused.

"Tony!" said Major Cromwell-Smith.

"Ha! you are a fogley, a fossil—a fossil, Cromwell, I say. It is a sign of crusted age to be prejudiced. I have no bias. No, no; I am not against the new, provided—provided they respect the established. After all, even you—ah—were a baby once, and—ah—facially bald."

He laughed in a trumpeting manner.

"Well, well!" remarked Mr Truby, surprised.

"And babies are crude and new enough, in all conscience."

The Major was not a whit put out of countenance by this challenge.

"Can even you be flippant, Anthony? These are holiday spirits! What has come to the soul of Magog that he should be blessing anything not green with odoriferous mould? This is, indeed, holiday humour! As for babies, I can't say I know much about 'em. Harriet has—ah, to put it delicately—not been blessed."

"Cromwell!"

"All right, my love; Elizabeth's not here. Babies, Tony, are vastly overrated persons. I have no respect for creatures who cannot blow their own noses. But children! Jove, I adore 'em. They aren't crude. Little girleses are fairies with the added advantages of being human. Dianas in epitome! Multitudinous Muses! The dear divinities-in-little are positively old-fashioned until they are spoiled."

"No one spoils children as earnestly as you

do, Cromwell," his wife declared; "and you are talking a great deal of nonsense."

"Of course I am, my dear! Children! A text for velvet eloquence. The dear little monsters. If I were in Parliament—as Hugh is going to be—I'd make the children absolutely my first concern. Look after them, I say; and you look after the future of the Empire."

"Bravo, uncle! That's the thing!" Hugh's eyes and enthusiasm kindled. He was earnest with all the easy fanaticism of the novice. He spoke excitedly, loudly.

"Oh, do you say so, Hugh? Then probably I'm not so right after all."

The company in general laughed. Hugh's social fervour was held by the relatives to be rather funny. It's a way relatives have.

"Yes, you are, uncle," he replied, ignoring them; "it's the children that matter—the children that matter! I have seen."

"Seen what?" asked his father with sudden chill. Anthony could never regard his son's social wanderings with ease and humour. The smiles of the Family finished abruptly. This new suspiciousness of Hugh's deeds and intentions was for ever cropping-up, even in the hours of holiday. On this occasion Hugh was, unfortunately, blind to it. He was so much in love, so excited with the dear subject, his new crusade, that mere externals did not hamper him.

"The wrongs of the children," he answered with emphatic, quiet seriousness.

"The wrongs of the children?" echoed his sire, as if quoting a platitude of small reality.

Hugh was galled by the tone. He flushed, and began to reply; but finding the occasion inopportune and unsympathetic, said nothing. He was inclined to glower, but was too sensible to do so.

Mrs Arnold, sandwiching anxiety for her son between her thoughts of hospitable carefulness, began to feel nervous.

"If I were you, my boy," said the father with deliberation, not free from traces of pomposity, "I should leave these serious questions alone. When you are an established barrister, you may talk of such things in the reforming manner. It will be right for you to do it then; though I hope your reforming manner will always be endued with a Conservative spirit. Meanwhile—ah—outside Parliament, it is generally waste of time. What can—what can—the average man do? That is it—not talk, but do—do!"

"Surely much, father, if he will."

"Nonsense! nonsense! Have some salad, Truby, eh?"

Hugh was again nettled. He was in too deadly earnestness to be summarily brushed aside. His father had not, would not, possibly could not, realise he had come to manhood's years.

"I know what I am talking about, father. It was to study such things that I settled in London. I have seen sights there which I believe you, in your well-ordered life, can have no conception of."

Some of them gasped. Sir Anthony looked at

his son with stony amazement. His fork, on which was impaled a radish, hung in mid-air. It was as if the welkin waited. Cecily tried to catch Hugh's eye. She even made some cautious clatter with a plate and a dessert-spoon. He was too excited to notice her. Mrs Arnold had become very conscious of the possibilities of storm.

"You must not have a third helping of veal-pie," she warned Millicent, who was full of a jelly-like fury at being given this open warning.

Such was Mrs Arnold's attempt at inspiring peace. It was not in any way effectual, for the plump child merely looked sulky, while Sir Anthony began what, from experience, he believed would be the best, last word.

"That is not why you are in London," he said. Hugh deemed it best just then not to reply.

This time the Major intervened.

"Who makes cat's-cradles nowadays?" he asked with blandness. "Who now cares for brandy-balls? What children play honey-pots, prisoner's base, and bat, trap and ball? What has become of the gallanty show?" With such unanswerable questions, the matter of great difference was moored out of sight.

But not again, during the afternoon, did Hugh or his father act, or talk quite with their wonted spirits. Each knew there was now vital difference between them; that a battle of wills must come. They played on opposite sides in a family game of rounders, and were equally undistinguished.

"You are to be careful," Cecily was able to say to Hugh, earnestly. "Quarrelling will do no good; and your father is your father."

"I know, but——"

"There is no 'but.' He has a right to regulate your ways!"

"A right!" this scornfully.

"Yes, he has: you must be patient."

"I'll do my best," he then promised, with a shrug. "At any rate I won't invite a quarrel;" but, meanwhile, he writhed and squirmed inwardly at his father's treatment of him; and, despite promises and protestations, was unconsciously thirsting for conflict.

The restraint, openly shown, galled him. He treated himself to a sort of lay Longer Catechism. Why should he always be in leading-strings? It was preposterous—utterly unreasonable. Why could he not have freedom unhampered to develop his individuality? Was he not twenty-five? Was he such a weakling? Here were Truby and Manners—no older than he, and good chaps, but brainless—entirely unfettered; then why should he be subject to grandmotherly chains? He had no thought of misusing liberty, he protested to himself; but actually of using it, for the benefit of others, well.

At the same time, Sir Anthony was in somewhat similar unhappiness, debating within himself. He hated these differences. They were gall and wormwood to him. Indeed, they struck at the very heart of his ideal, the united Family. Why was Hugh so—different? Mr Arnold was

a generous man. He would have been the first to sympathise and help another whose material troubles and wants were put plainly before him; but in the closest concerns of life he was often blind. Whatever was, was rightly so. Rule and order were necessary. They were other names for discipline. He looked to his sons and daughters to follow the same well-paved pathway, and was dismayed to find his first-born determinately refusing to do so.

He loved Hugh even better than the mother did, because he had hoped for so much from him; and, for that very reason, particularly lamented his obstinate insubordination. This perpetual wish to run amok—as he deemed it—was detestable. How was it to be accounted for? He bothered himself with anxious questions; and meanwhile missed two of the easiest possible catches.

It was not as if the boy had no good example. There was himself. . . . He felt that Hugh was guilty of desertion. An ugly thought, but he accepted it. Had mischief-makers then accused his son of being a red Radical, a fiery Socialist, a consort of anarchists with bombs, he would have promptly believed them. Anything was possible in that hour of disillusion. Hugh was a disappointment—that was flat.

Such were the ramblings of his cogitation, punctuated by very soft exercise after the rounders ball. He did not condescend to trot. The Major, on the other side, was equally energetic. The afternoon—though he joined in

the family games and echoed the laughter—was to Anthony almost an unendurable time. He wanted this wretched business to be settled—his way.

The journey back to Folkestone began with the first of the twilight. They marched, while birds twittered, towards the dying splendour of the sun.

Anthony's original intention had been to ride in the wagonette with his wife, Aunt Harriet, and the Major, while the younger ones walked; but he determined, while still the trouble was hot in him, to come that very evening to an understanding with Hugh.

It was necessary to clear the air. Both of them knew it; each in his way dreaded the prospect of trouble, yet went resolutely to meet it.

As soon as the picnic-party—their laughing talk sounding clearly in the rarefied air of the heights—had started homewards, Hugh and his father, insensibly in agreement to do so, dropped behind the others. Anthony came to the point at once.

“Hugh, it won't do, it won't do!” he protested.

Hugh was stirred by the sudden, blunt energy of the attack. His feelings surged within him; but he fought with and suppressed them. He remembered Cecily's warning.

“Dear father, these misunderstandings are horrible; but cost what it may, I must go my own way. I do wish you would trust me; you

must trust me," he declared. He held out a hand. His face was white. He trembled with earnestness.

Anthony brushed the appeal aside.

"I will not have it," he cried. "As I pay the piper, you shall dance to my tune—to the tune I call."

He looked angrily at his son. The challenge, the command of his glance set fire to Hugh's patience. Rebellion was let loose.

"I cannot."

"You shall! You shall! You shall!"

Anthony punched the air with his fist. He raised his voice: he had become very excited.

"Father, don't let us quarrel! I'm not doing anything, not a thing, to hurt you or the Family."

"How do I know?"

"You have my word for it."

"Yes; but——"

"You must know. You do know. I'm your son. My word is as good as your's. I know what honour means." Hugh's voice rang out with indignation. Mrs Arnold, riding in the distance, hearing its tone though not its burden of words, took out her handkerchief. She would like to have wiped her eyes, she was anxious; but could not do so unnoticed.

"Thank God for that!" said Anthony, with solemn piety, after a pause.

"I hold our name in all the respect you have taught me to do. I won't dishonour it. I promise you, father! But, I beg you, don't

think hastily of me. Let me be plainly honest and frank. Let me go my own considered way. Indeed, I must go the way I want to, even though you don't see eye to eye with me about it."

"This is sheer, wicked, brazen obstinacy, Hugh; and very ungrateful!"

"No! Obstinacy implies unreasonable stubbornness. I'm not like that. I can, if you will only let me, give you ample reasons for everything I do; reasons strong and adequate. But you won't let me! You won't understand!"

"For a very good reason!"

"I tried to show you my wishes and point of view when mother and you talked it over with me in the library at home. I thought you saw my point then—you acted so readily and kindly. But, somehow, you have changed since. I don't know why. I can't imagine why. I've had no reason for it, certainly!"

"I know why," cried Sir Anthony, whose determination was rather spurred by the spirit of resistance offered by Hugh. "You have been seen in questionable company."

"Never! Who has said so?"

"No matter who; I have it on good authority. You have been seen with all manner of men——"

"Men! Good heavens! Of course I have. Most properly I have. All men who act honourably and decently I regard as gentlemen."

"Of course!" Sir Anthony was scornful.

"I have friends,"—Hugh was furious. His

father's tone had roused him—"gentlemen, in very humble circumstances, manual labourers some of them, artisans, dockers, a policeman, a commissioner. I won't deceive you. I'll be quite frank. They've been to supper with me in Stafford's Inn. I have debated and talked politics and social questions—questions of life and livelihood—with them. Oh, I wish you would—would put aside these—tendencies, father, and come with me one day. Then you would realise what fine fellows, true men, hard workers, idealists, keen and experienced politicians, these men often are. I wish you would. Anyhow you have no reason to distrust me." He spoke with particular deliberation and firmness. "I am strengthened by knowing them. They drive away the priggishness, the snobbishness, the conceit. I know my weaknesses. They help me; they have shown me something of real life; they help me better than books."

Hugh had ended. He had said his say. He awaited his father's answer. They walked for some minutes in silence. There was laughter in front of them, and the stillness of the uplands behind.

The stars were lighting their lamps above. The birds were asleep. Here and there a cricket chirped. The grey darkened to purple. Peace seemed to rule everywhere; except in those two obstinate hearts. It was a completely wrong-headed comedy. It was partly jealous affection that drove them both awry.

"It will not do," said Anthony at last. "You

cannot know these people as you think you do. No doubt, at present, they interest you, because—ah, without being vain I may say it—you have been kept pretty closely among our equals. I'm no snob, as I suppose you would now put it; but I know that class-distinctions cannot be levelled—disregarded—with impunity. I object very strongly to your going about with people—however admirable—whom, for your sisters' sakes, I should not think of welcoming to my table. Aha! That's the test! Now tell me?" He leaned forward eagerly—"Would you care to introduce these men—tell me honestly—would you care to introduce them to your mother, to Alice, to Betty, to—ah—to Aunt Maria?"

"Of course I would," said Hugh heartily. "They would act with intelligence and courtesy, I know. Who wants finnickings ways? Their table-manners are right in intention. I am confident you would be glad to have a talk with some of them if I could only manage it."

"Good Lord!" cried the father, "the boy's daft, demented, impossible; and an Arnold too; an—Arnold!" He looked at Hugh as they passed the first lamp-post. "It is evidently not for nothing," he added solemnly, "that you have little of the Arnold lip. Dear, dear! Good Lord! Good—Lord!"

Again for a spell they tramped silently among houses. They were catching up the others who, wearied, had left their laughter on the hills. Then abruptly the father said.

"Hugh, I'm sorry it must be; but I dock your allowance. Until you come to me and say, 'I'll do as you wish, not as I wish,' I must cut your allowance down. One hundred a year; clerk's pay; not a halfpenny more. That's all you can expect from me." He paused, before adding significantly, "Then we shall see!"

He shook his head determinately. The motion was lost in the night.

"All right, father." After a pause Hugh responded. "It is kind of you to give me anything. I feel it, and mean it sincerely. I don't mind being hard up. It leaves me the more free."

"The more free!" Sir Anthony echoed. He felt suddenly weak. "Let us join the others."

Early in the following morning, Hugh returned to Stafford's Inn.

CHAPTER XII

BETWEEN THE ACTS

STAFFORD'S INN seemed to Hugh more than ever stuffy, limited, darkened, after the breadth, breeze, and sunshine of the Kentish downs.

Still, when the holiday rust was worked away, he was glad to be back ; glad to be at the bustle of things ; almost fanatically glad to be really nearer to necessity.

His father's determination to cut down the allowance was actually an incentive. It fired his intentions, steeled his heart. No mediæval anchorite, indulging the luxury of self-abnegation with pain, could more willingly have welcomed an additional discomfort. He cast about for means to replace the deficiency of income, though as yet that did not press ; and, as usual, was to find a friend in deed in Roddy Brook.

There had been no holiday, this year, for that mercurial journalist ; and though he made something of a martyrdom of the deprivation, he secretly preferred being so deprived. He exulted in the atmosphere of Fleet Street—a lover of lights and lamp-posts—and found a day without buzz and “copy” a day of desolation indeed.

Hugh therefore discovered in him a sufficient counsellor and friend.

They talked things over frankly. Roddy leaped at, and suggested some hundred and two plans; Hugh thought the odd two might be possibly practicable.

They had dined at their usual corner-table at a newspaper caravanserai—where an Italian waiter with a wide grin and a vague familiar air, knowing them regular customers, took pains to please them—and an hour afterwards were back in Hugh's room smoking contentedly, until the digestive hour was ended. Hugh was then about to return to his classics—he was deep in Euripides and Addison—and Brook to obey the commanding sub-editorial call, when there was a knock at the door.

"A visitor," said Hugh, lugubriously. "Drat it!"

"I think I know who it is." Brook opened the door. "Hullo, Daphne! Haven't seen you for months and months. Brought the laundry? You look pale. Been ill?"

A weedy girl, with a courageous blouse and some tinsel jewellery, stood there.

"Yes, Mr Brook. These are for Mr Arnold, those for you. Mother says there's a sock missing; but it will be all right."

"Oh, hang the sock! Sorry you've been ill, Daphne! What was it? Mrs Stevens has said nothing about it."

The girl did not answer. She handed the

parcels to Roderick Brook, and was prepared to go.

"You look tired!" Hugh then said, for the first time noticing her. "Have a glass of wine! Sit down for a few minutes and rest. Roddy, pour it out for her. Have a biscuit too! There's no hurry."

"Thank you, sir; thank you very much."

She spoke gushingly as a novelette fine lady might speak; and nervously played with her apparently-pearl necklace.

The girl sat there for a little time resting in the cushioned chair, sipping the port appreciatively, nibbling a biscuit. Her impudent Cockney eyes seemed not so confident now. She kept them to the floor. Her manner was strangely out-of-ease.

"What's been the matter with you, Daphne?" Brook asked again.

"Oh, nothin', Mr Brook; 'eadaches and that. I'm well again now."

Her uneasiness was still more evident; the youths instinctively felt trespassers, and, not to distress her, talked of other, their own, concerns.

After a little while, with thanks, *staccato*, she rose; and after a glance at her hat in a wall-mirror, went.

"There's something strange about that girl," said Hugh. "I had the idea she was too perky."

"So she was — had the Cockney's cheek, gave the glad eye as freely as any of 'em. But these London girls have no stamina. They

work long hours, eat sweetmeats when they ought to be building their bodies with nourishing food, go nightly to places of cheap entertainment—music-halls, cinematographs—breathing bad air. No wonder they're anæmic; and when married have rickety children. If Stevens had sense she'd get her into the country for a time."

"The country would be misery to such as she. They want noise and bustle, metropolitan smells and lights."

"Same here!"

"It's a pity these feeble, bloodless creatures can't be prevented from marrying. Some day I hope we shall prevent the marriage of the physically and mentally unfit." Hugh clenched a political fist. "It is the children that matter—so many of them are born doomed."

"Born doomed!" Roddy echoed solemnly, "We are all that;" and as he looked at his watch, "I'll be doubly-doomed, though that's not exactly the expression, if I don't get back to the *Mercury*. So long!"

Hugh opened his Addison, and read the vision of Mirza. The ecstasy and the mystery reft away his spirit. He was borne a far distance from Stafford's Inn. He crossed the threshold of the wilderness where the dream-flowers grow; and fell in a muse on life. Whether in Fleet Street or in far Bagdad, its mysteries are the same. Life, this life, is a weird experience.

The next day he asked his laundress if her daughter were better.

"Yes, sir," she answered, looking curiously at

him. "Thank you for your kindness, Daphie is quite recovered." She sniffed. "She is so like her poor dear father."

Mrs Stevens put the corner of her apron to her mouth, and looked with dull eyes in the direction of a picture-nail.

Hugh, though inwardly he wondered what had been the poor dear father's complaint, felt a trespasser within the domestic cupboard where the skeletons are shelved; so he turned the conversation to hearthrugs, and, in the stress and study of his daily business soon ceased to think of Daphne Stevens or her mother, other than as loosely-connected parts of an inefficient domestic machine.

Hugh's self-satisfaction, fortified by his greater liberty, as he deemed it, now that the allowance was appreciably smaller, had a constant cold douche whenever he ventured home.

Misunderstandings about his aims, objects, and independence were wretchedly rife. All the Family, except the Cromwell-Smiths and his own mother, gave him tepid greetings, tending towards frigidity as the more distant circles of the relatives were reached. Their beautiful eyes were for ever cold to him. There was no fatted calf of affection killed for that unpetted prodigal.

Anthony, controlling his natural kindness, treated him with definite rigour. Mrs Arnold was too loyally her husband's wife and too negative in character to act as a peacemaker.

Hugh came to feel ostracised, especially as Cecily, in these days, was generally absent.

Determinately, he went home more frequently and regularly than before, because of the seeming coldness and apparent want of welcome. He purposed, by warmth of filial devotion, to melt the barriers; but that was not to be. The small offerings of the olive-branch which he ventured to make were misunderstood; and so he drifted, more and more, out of sympathy from the rest. The foolish breach widened sensibly.

Hugh had his faults; but the main cause of this hardening of their difference was no other than Sir Anthony. From the moment the good man was back from Folkestone, and engrossed again with his manifold responsibilities, he became unusually touchy and irritable. Everybody, naturally, knowing of the difference between father and son, ascribed his trouble to Hugh, especially as Anthony himself was convinced it was so, and did not mind openly confessing it. This tended to strengthen the Family feeling against their prodigal—who had not the Arnold lip.

The coldness grew; the ice hardened. Hugh began increasingly to know the difficulty of feeling one with his Family.

It was to his business anxieties that Sir Anthony's irritability was primarily due. Copthall Avenue was going through a tiresome time; the bulls were languid, and the bears depressing. There had been rapid inflation in

the values of oil shares, in which his house had recently come to be specially interested; and then—a tumbling slump. The market, already feverish, grew rapidly excited, was inclined to panic. This had an unsettling effect on Anthony. He had no cause for loss of confidence, his resources were ample; a diminution of nominal value was all in the day's work. It had happened before, and would do so again and again so long as money bought money. To-morrow, things might be up again; or if they were not so, if the fall continued, there was always opportunity for the skilful and astute broker to cut his losses cheaply. Investors will always pay.

Anthony Arnold was astute and skilful enough; but he allowed himself to worry, and, through hesitancy, to miss opportunities. He lost confidence to some extent in his own judgment, putting the results down, as patriotic people will do, chiefly to the follies and viciousness of the Government; but partly to Hugh.

His mind was so occupied and obsessed with business—he worked so perpetually in a state of fuss and rush, and became so frightened of mere phantoms of ruin—that he exaggerated the misfortunes due to occasional miscalculations and wrong judgment. He became unusually irritable; and though, being a decent citizen and admirable family man—he was still the Head of an Exceptional Family—he endeavoured to school his feelings and be his normal self in the family circle, he did not entirely succeed in his intentions—because of Hugh!

Hugh's obstinacy and unwisdom made him an easy scapegoat. Hugh was always to blame. Sir Anthony's temporary business losses had unnerved him. He was convinced the cause was Hugh.

Unfortunately, at this juncture, Cecily added to his unsettlement. Used to considering himself something of a special representative of Providence to the wide circle of relatives, within which his own Family was the golden heart, he instinctively disliked any move towards independence on the part of an individual belonging to that circle. He had gladly adopted Cecily—without expressing the fact in words—and had come to love her, regarding her as his daughter, the sister of Alice, Betty, and Millicent. And now, she, too, had rebelled, as he called it—rebelled was always the word!

Cecily had followed her long-growing intentions by asking to be allowed to learn shorthand and typewriting, using her small capital for the purpose, in order that she might earn her living.

Sir Anthony, characteristically, took her request almost as a personal affront. He was more than usually worried at the time, though none of his daughters or Cecily had reason to know it, and gave her application its wrong proportions. She was surprised and dismayed to find him troubled at the idea. She appealed to him with a show of good reasoning. Her appeals did not help because suspicions fed his vision. Hugh must be the cause of this new

mischief. There was some vague similarity in the reasons each advanced. Unhappy Anthony; unhappy Hugh! Cecily had carefully refrained from mentioning Hugh. In his mean and yellow mood, the omission confirmed his suspicions.

Lord, what fools these mortals be!

Sir Anthony rubbed his chin and settled his white waistcoat seriously. His old confidence—his large pose—was, for the time being, gone.

"Is our circle crumbling?" he complained weakly. "It seems so. You, Cecily, are one of us. Remember that! One of us!"

"You have always shown that I was, Mr Arnold. You have proved it. I know it; but why, even then, should I be in any way a burden on you, when I can and ought to help myself?"

He looked at her with grave and gentle eyes.

"You are not a burden on us, my dear; that—that's not the way to put it. You—ah—help us. I wish you'd call me uncle or something. My wife is very fond of you; so am I; yes, so am I; and I'm sure the girls regard you as their sister." He shook his head kindly.

"Oh, it is so difficult," cried Cecily, truly distressed. She had a feeling then that it would have been better not to have come to the Dene at all, better to have found her means of livelihood at once.

"Not at all!" Something of his old cocksureness had come again. "It is as easy as

anything. I promised Tom Secretan I'd be a father to you, and I'll keep my word."

Cecily realised the *impasse*.

"You have been absolutely kind, so has Mrs Arnold!" Then stirred by his generosity of spirit, and in earnest for her opportunity, she appealed. "Dear Mr Arnold, let me always know you are my friend, to whom I can come for counsel when I need it; but——"

"Hugh has put you up to this," he interrupted sharply. His anger, now ever sharp against his son, broke through the affectionate kindness with which he regarded Cecily.

She was shocked into protest.

"Indeed, he has not!"

"Has he not? Then his example has set you to it! I'm sure of it. I am grieved with that boy. Don't imitate him, my dear. Be happy with us. Here's your home. You are—yes—my adopted daughter. There is no need for you to earn your living. Very well! You shall stay here till you are married. Remember that!"

"Oh, thank you," she said, with gratitude and trouble commingled.

She walked to the window and looked with preoccupied eyes at the birds in the garden. Tobias was stalking them.

What was to be done? How to persuade this obdurate, good man that it was not kindness on his part to keep her in comfortable idleness? She realised the hopelessness of that effort. Release could not yet be won.

She returned to him and thanked him.

As the days passed, her restlessness, the desire to be earning and doing, so quickened and grew, that she was compelled to appeal once more. She did so this time to Mrs Arnold, begging her to intercede and explain. Mrs Arnold was ineffectual. Cecily was compelled again to approach Sir Anthony. It was one of his unfortunate days, when he saw only doom for the British Empire and disappointment in Hugh—and her. He became tempestuously impatient, rattled his watch-chain, talked vaguely of unreasonableness, shook a white head at an ungrateful universe. Cecily, eager not to wound him, again withdrew her plea.

It was Alice and Betty who eventually brought the release. The dear girls truly did not care for Cecily. They secretly resented her adoption, as the father too often, too openly called it: and the mild infatuation possessed for her by Mr Truby was raging yet. Alice, although the Model Daughter, was naturally of a jealous disposition. Betty, being younger, and more devoted to Work, was not so inclined to find cause for dissatisfaction; but was easily to be influenced.

The sisters, in their ways, with different intentions, realising that Cecily was restless and passing through a phase of disfavour, began openly to remark on her want of interest in the Family doings, of her indifference to such social duties as were entailed by the open-door hospitality of the Dene, of her preference for long walks in short skirts, to dawdling among the

sofas and the tattlers, of her indifference to sentimental novels and growing unmaidenly eagerness to study unparty politics, of her frankness with those she met — “unblushing” said Alice to Cousin Elizabeth—of her want of proper pride, as they called it.

All this was subtly administered to Sir Anthony in gentle doses, generally by Alice. He began to feel genuinely distressed about Cecily, to look at her also with suspicious, unsatisfied eyes, now that he was becoming more and more engrossed and obsessed with business worries. In the midst of a brooding brown study, he would raise a tired head, enigmatically declare, “I do not understand it,” and nod at vacancy.

Poor man! His heart was paved with good intentions. Truly he did not understand. He was in many things not wise, one of our perpetual children.

Worked on in these ways he began to find second meanings in some of Cecily’s most innocent phrases. When she joined, as she did quite freely, in the Family games, he imagined she did so half-heartedly. When, for some good reason, she refrained from entering into them, or went for tramps in the short skirts offensive to Alice, it was because she was unwilling to belong to the sacred home circle. Nothing was well; white was yellow. She must be, she was, ungrateful! So was it, also, when in the hour before the dinner dressing-bell rang, they assembled to talk of the somethings and nothings

of the day. Constitutionally, among such topics, she could rarely be more than a listener. Mrs Benjamin's new sables, Mrs Humphrey Blight's third daughter's fiancé's golf-strokes, Sir James John Jones—he was a city knight—his pink-coloured Panhard, were among the subjects on which she had no views. Whatever she did, said, or did not say or do, was resolutely miscalled or misunderstood. Anthony Arnold, with his natural shrewdness and business experience and acumen, should have been wiser than he proved; but his was really a simple soul and trusting nature; and his doubts, fed by the artless artfulness of Alice, helped by the indolent Betty, caused him slowly to recede from his position of resolute refusal to grant Cecily the right to fend for herself.

One evening, with unexpected suddenness, he said to her, "I have thought about what you said to me, my dear. If you are of the same opinion still, I am willing. I'll help you as much as you will let me." His tones were quiet and uncoloured. He was evidently disappointed.

"Thank you," she said warmly. Her eyes glowed, her cheeks burned with gratitude.

He read this evidence of her satisfaction with cold eyes and a flare of strange jealousy. His satisfaction of proprietorship was stung. He wondered at her ingratitude.

"Very well then," he said shortly.

She felt on the moment a blow on the heart. His manner was so unusual. She realised there was misunderstanding somewhere, but

was unable to comprehend it, or explain it away. Anyhow she was to have again the freedom she lost when Tom Secretan died. It was as if doors to a delectable garden were suddenly opened to her.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAJOR PROTESTS

A YEAR passed.

Things were the same in the Family, only more so.

Hugh had continued his highly abandoned courses, and, in spite of his "clerk's-pay," seemed strangely settled and content. Cecily had learned her shorthand trade, and was earning twenty-five shillings a week in a shipping office, living, not too well, at a club for women in Westminster, and going to the Dene for most of the week-ends. So far for the independents.

Anthony Arnold seemed still more worried, still less confident than he had been a year before. He was obsessed with pessimistic imaginings, was constantly foreseeing disasters. England and the world were tottering on the brink and edge of the end of all things. The last ditch had become his favourite figure of speech. His temper, once so placid, with all its positiveness, grew short and shorter; a habit of nervous introspection, and of mumbled brief soliloquy had come upon him. The twelve

months had caused him some deterioration. His old cocksuredness and persistent misreading of facts was causing him to hasten to the other extreme of lost confidence and infinite suspicion.

His wife bore the changes philosophically, and took the greater pains to ensure that the sheets and linen were perfectly aired, and the meals well cooked. The rest of the Family were as they had been.

Cousin Elizabeth was again staying with the Arnolds. Her position in the household had become a little more permanent. She seemed to have added touches of tartness to her always militant meekness. She sewed unceasingly. Her mission was still insistent. The heathen had cause to complain of her over-devotion to them. Aunt Maria was still a sort of severe light in the distant darkness.

Circumstances, drifting, came to a climax, which was something of a cataclysm.

Hugh, writing to his mother, enclosed in the letter, a thunderbolt.

She read aloud this part of his communication. The silence became strained as she was reading.

"You will be interested to know I have adopted a boy, a baby, a queer atom; he interests and puzzles me. May I bring him down for you to see? I should not be surprised if he needs Chilston air. How would the girls like it? He's a quaint brat. It was my duty; otherwise, be sure, I should not have taken this charge. Yesterday, he tried to

swallow the soap on my shaving-brush and howled. Roddy wants me to call him Absalom, because his hair could bear cutting; but that would hardly be kind to him. I suppose he must be christened for safety's sake. I'd rather like Uncle Crom. to be a god-parent and Alice; but there's time for that. I'm making a scientific study of him. I think I'll write a book, called the Bare Baby, by an Unprejudiced Observer."

Mrs Arnold finished reading, and looked at the Family. The Family stared back at her, a circle of amazed eyes.

"My word!" Anthony gasped. He was the first to find his powers of speech. "I give Hugh up." The tone was final.

The Family felt that sentence of banishment had been declared.

"It will greatly distress dear Aunt Maria," said Elizabeth, as gently she wiped away an invisible tear.

"How can it have happened? It is so strange," Mrs Arnold complained. "A baby!" She was awed.

"A futile baby!" echoed Betty.

"A wretched baby!" said Alice.

Millicent tried to say something, but her mouth was occupied with jujubes and her remark was inarticulate.

"Hugh will persist in doing the wrong thing. It is all a piece of his colossal, sublime conceit and—ah—unmitigated obstinacy." Sir Anthony spoke sharply, wagged a bewildered head, and

thought hard things of Hugh. "We must consider about it ; perhaps—perhaps we must——"

Again, in the usual manner, he paused ; the aposiopesis was this time less significant. He pulled at his waistcoat, settled his necktie, clicked his tongue. Tschah !

"It'll serve Hugh right if the brat's a beast!" was Alice's verdict.

"It's sure to be a beast," said Betty. "I'm not keen on babies. I shan't be a mother."

"I wonder who—who is the mother," Elizabeth remarked, as she blinked and blushed a yellow pink. She was a little awed at the possible impropriety of her own words.

Here was a new question which none of them could answer.

The letter was taken from Mrs Arnold and generally passed round. There was no denying its import. There was no gainsaying its burden. It was no practical joke! Worse luck!

"He must pay for it!" the father said, in his finality manner.

And there the subject was to be left till there could be more information.

The Family was certainly dumbfounded. To say that a bomb had exploded, a bolt fallen from the blue, an earthquake wrought havoc, would be but an insipid version of the consternation caused by Hugh's development.

It was, however, not many minutes before the tantalising topic was again being fruitlessly discussed.

"It is exactly what Aunt Maria predicted—just as she said it would be." There was an eerie glint of satisfaction in Elizabeth's upturned eyes.

"Goodness! What!" cried Anthony, in astonishment. "What!"

"About the—baby?" asked Mrs Arnold, who, again, was awed. This was a day to her of constantly recurring awe.

"Oh, no!" answered the spinster. "She is too—far too refined to think of—babies. But except for that, it is just what dear Aunt Maria foretold. She is always right!"

"Oh! very well! Very well, then!" said Anthony, as he cut and put between his teeth a cigar which would be lighted in the library. He was very anxious to end this present stage of the intolerable topic. But that was not yet to be.

"How can it have happened?" asked Mrs Arnold again. The worst fears and forebodings took possession of their inexperienced minds. Elizabeth had become a perfect picture of virginal contempt. Whatever it was, was wrong—that at least was certain.

"He must pay for it!"

Betty was the least concerned. She had somewhat of a philosophical temperament, where the woes of others were concerned.

"There is something almost artistic about Hugh," she declared. "He will go his own way in spite of consequences, and always manages to attract attention. If he loved literature or

music—if he had genius, all might be forgiven ; but there is nothing to justify his notable eccentricities.”

Having made that pronouncement, she unscrewed her fountain-pen, and with some ostentation departed.

“Aunt Maria will be shocked and vexed. It is one more burden to carry!”

“He must pay for it ! He shall pay for it !”

So, at last, it was left. Sir Anthony fussed away to his documents and trusteeships in the library.

Hugh received no reply to his letter. This bewildered and discouraged him. He decided not to visit Chilston when Saturday came.

It was well he came to that decision, for the Family, their appetite whetted by information, earnestly, even enthusiastically, distributed by Elizabeth and Alice, assembled in full force to discuss him.

His presence might have embarrassed them. An indignation meeting could hardly be held in the presence of its bugbear.

So seventeen members of the wider Family circle assembled in the drawing-room at the Dene. They had brought their ears and their tongues with them, and were prepared to wax even indignant. Someone, mischievously or fatuously, had put Hugh's silver-framed photograph prominently at the centre of the grand piano. The relatives talked of it, some with subdued voices, as if the photograph would be offended at their too plain speech.

Who can doubt the truths of telepathy, that mystic wonder? Hugh's left ear burnt till it ached. The baby, too, suffered discomfort, less near the intellect. It howled. Mrs Stevens had repeatedly to say "Diddums!" Only the Cromwell-Smiths were inclined to find excuses for the Family scapegoat.

Sir Anthony, not entirely prepared for this sympathetic invasion, adopted an attitude of noble resignation. He felt something of a Roman father—what stage-folk term a heavy father, perhaps. He eyed Tom affectionately. The plump lad had become the paternal hope, the worthier heir of hopes and traditions, for Hugh was a failure!

Mr Arnold took a shilling from his pocket, looked at it thoughtfully with pursed and sorrowful eyes, and then put it back again. He saw himself the centre of a scene of disinheritance—himself was stern, heartbroken, eminently picturesque.

The trouble was that Anthony even now knew no more than did his visitors of the reasons why Hugh had taken upon himself the troubles of amateur fatherhood. That was, in reality, no small measure of the boy's offence. Had he realised, as from past experience he should have done, that this invasion of relatives was practically assured as soon as the circumstance was known, he would have vigorously remonstrated with his first-born, and secured some sort of explanation—which he could explain. But in his present ignorance it all was inexplicable; and

he had of necessity to shroud himself in a mantle of pronounced resignation.

It took some little time for the ball of general conversation to roll in Hugh's direction. It was a case of Strachan and Chatham. The relatives waited for Anthony to be at 'em. As, however, the great, good man did nothing but adopt a high-priestlike attitude of official silence; as, also, Mrs Arnold was determinately reticent on every subject but tea-things and the coughs and complaints of the aunts, it was necessary for one of them to begin. After some prodding, nodding, and eager whispering that was the privilege of age, Great-Aunt Selina was bullied into taking the carpet.

"What's the boy Hugh been doing? What? What's this they are telling me. Eh? What?"

Sir Anthony could not ignore the shrill inquiry of the ancient dame.

"Oh, nothing; nothing, great - aunt!" he answered hastily.

"What does he say?" she bawled to her nearest neighbour, her subdued and nervous niece, Rebecca.

"He says, 'Nothing,' great-aunt," was articulated deliberately into her ear.

"But I saw him say something. Are you deaf, girl?"

"No, great-aunt. He did say something. He said, 'Nothing, nothing, great-aunt.'"

The old lady looked at her earnest informant with sharp, suspicious eyes. "I'm ashamed of

you, Rebecca!" and shut herself huffily into herself, sulking for the rest of the afternoon.

The Family felt pained and discouraged. They looked at Anthony with asking eyes. Surely he would be his frank self and satisfy their curiosity.

"Why need I tell you? You know. Evidently, you all know. The less said about it, the——"

He was interrupted. The visitors were not to be baulked of their conversational prey.

"A sad, sad thing this seems of Hugh," one of them said. "To be responsible for a baby at Hugh's time of life generally means something which—um, is this any place for Tom?—even men and matrons should refrain from thinking."

"Tom, clear out!" said his father. "Where's Millicent?"

"She was watching cook in the pantry."

Tom went unwillingly and clumsily. He knocked over a stool and trod on a cousinly foot.

"I'll believe no scandal of Hugh," Mrs Cromwell-Smith declared stoutly. "The boy's right, I'm sure. He has a reason for it. He's always got a reason for all he does, even though it may be a bad one. He uses his brains; he has studied—yes; but an adopted baby is a quaint hobby for any unmarried gentleman. It is very like Asterix defying the lightning."

Two or three opened lips to answer this outburst; but the Major, loyal to his spouse, was the first off the mark.

"Bravo, Harriet! In the generations gone
——"

"Singularly selfish, even disgraceful," murmured Elizabeth, as if she were reciting from an hour-book.

"Eh?" Anthony sharply interrogated. He was roused at last.

"I am quoting what our dear Aunt Maria said in a letter I received this morning." Elizabeth shivered with anxiety not to displease. "No disgrace on you, of course, dear Cousin Anthony."

"Oh!"

"Nor on anyone," the Major exploded. "If your dear Aunt Maria talks that sort of——"

"Hush!" cried several, aghast. The Major was brought to pause very near the verge of domestic blasphemy.

"Well, pompous gibberish, will that do!"

They shivered. He glared at them indignantly.

"No!" answered Elizabeth, with a new-born brazenness.

"In my young days every man had a right to a hearing before he was put to judgment and condemned. But, nowadays, all the feminine——"

"Cromwell!" cautioned his wife.

"I thought they were feminine, my dear—busy-bodies——"

"Cromwell!"

"Tabbies!"

"Cromwell! Cromwell!"

"Then let me say lady-friends—even of his closest, are eager to be down on him. Intoler-

able! The fact is, Tony, your son is a good plucked 'un."

"He is original!" said Aunt Harriet, hoping to have led her husband away from the morass of danger in which the old warrior revelled and wallowed.

"Hugh is always original," Betty sighed. "That's the trouble! We never know what he'll be up to next."

"What's there to haver about? He sows his wild oats by adopting babies. An estimable pursuit! Compared with that, the rakes and bloods of eighty years ago—when Mrs Selina and I were young, or thereabouts—were dogs of debauched selfishness. Hugh's a hero, and none of us see it."

"Such a proceeding was unheard-of, ever. A young man!"

"He is our son!" said Anthony vaguely. The truism did not help particularly.

"Well, give the boy a chance!" counselled the Major, who changed his mood to one of cozening appeal. "Give him a chance! As the Duke said when we were driving together, 'My dear Cromwell-Smith,' said his Grace, 'everyone, even dukes, should have fair-play.' Since that, to me, eminently honourable hour, I've been perfectly fair to everybody—including dukes; now, haven't I, Harriet?"

"I wonder!"

Anthony Arnold had followed the discussion with ill-disguised uneasiness. He was peculiarly sensitive on points of Family honour. Even

although Hugh was deep in his own bad books, he writhed at his being the butt of their tattle.

Anthony was divided against himself. Wroth was he with Hugh, thoroughly wroth and bitter; yet when these intruding relatives and distant generations were belittling him, he was instinctively inclined to champion him.

"Why exactly has Hugh adopted a baby?" he was suddenly asked.

He was bound to give straight answer. He swallowed his pride and responded, stuffily.

"The explanation has yet to come. Hugh is of full years. He has not condescended to explain. He thinks for himself."

"Of course, of course!" murmured Aunt Harriet soothingly.

Sir Anthony was, however, in such an upwrought, contradictory mood, that comments of any kind were bound to drive him in a reverse direction. Mrs Cromwell-Smith's coo roused his indignation.

"He thinks for himself," he repeated. "He does things without thought of others. He forgets, what he should not forget, that a Family—ah—a Family implies mutual concessions, sympathies, efforts. It is like a state, an empire. Its Oneness is its strength. There are persons—low-dog rascals—who decry the sweet, beneficent influences of home. The same men decry the empire. Halfpenny traitors! They would call the moon black if it suited their purposes to do so. Hugh, our firstborn, has forgotten that truth. He has broken from

the ideal. He is one with—these enemies. He has soured the joy of his father and of his mother through wilfulness. He has brought us both worry, much worry!”

Mrs Arnold began to apply a handkerchief to her eyes. Anthony, seeing her silent distress, was himself touched to emotion.

“We love the boy. It—it distresses us. We had made plans for him. He would have found the road to his ambition made ready for him; but it was not to be. He would go his own way; and if he breaks our hearts, his mother’s and mine——”

“Fustian, Tony!” interrupted the Major, impatiently: “Hugh isn’t the boy to break anyone’s heart. He’s a—he’s a—why, look at him. You ought to be proud of him, proud!”

“Major, Major!” one appealed.

“Dear Cousin Anthony! Cousin Catherine!” cried Elizabeth.

“Proud! Yes, proud! Many a boy with his opportunities would be spending his time in luxury and license, rotting about — as you moderns with your slang call it.”

“Really!” exclaimed Elizabeth—her eyes had grown as full of anger as meekness and mousiness would permit. “When Aunt Maria has said——”

“Whereas, he does his best,” the Major continued. Mrs Arnold stopped her tears to look at him. “He tries to help. Egad, you don’t deserve such a son, Tony; you don’t, indeed! The worst that can be said of Hugh

is that he is a prig ; and, demme—forgive me, it would out !—priggishness is no sin. You drag the Empire into everything. There's no need for tears, Kate, my dear ! As for the baby, I daresay some poor girl has got into a mess, and Hugh thinks he's doing what Sir Galahad would do !”

“Bravo, Uncle Crom,” cried Betty, from that moment prepared to be won over to the cause of the prodigal.

Mrs Arnold also looked her gratitude. She beamed with an April face. She forgot her doubts and woe, and poured out tea with a new will ; but Anthony was deeply offended.

“I am not in the habit of talking fustian,” he said, in his stateliest way.

“No offence meant !” the Major declared.

“My son is my son ; and if I choose to be displeased with him, I shall be displeased with, or without, the interference of any—brother-in-law !”

He managed to put considerable measure of contempt into the ultimate compound word.

“No offence meant, Tony, I assure you ! I'm one of the Family, and proud of it.”

“And no offence taken.” At once the changeable father answered, somewhat to Elizabeth's shrouded displeasure. “Hugh has grieved us bitterly. He must and shall pay for it, as he may happen to deserve. He shall, of course, have fair-play. I am a just man, my enemies would admit. I will at once invite an explanation. If it is not satisfactory——”

So the conference ended.

Cecily, home from town for the week-end, at that moment came in. She was greeted perfunctorily by one or two, ignored by most; welcomed affectionately by Mrs Arnold. With her arrival, the talk naturally drifted along new channels, and ceased to be general.

"I was a little frightened, Cromwell, when you talked that way," his wife whispered, as arm-in-arm they walked down the hill to the station.

He squeezed her arm and laughed in a self-satisfied manner.

"Did him good! Tony's a fogey! Talking like a deacon's sermon in that manner. He's got hold of the wrong end of the stick. He no more knows his son than—I love Elizabeth. I wish Hugh was our boy, Harriet."

She sighed.

"He's a great responsibility," she answered.

"Not a bit, my dear. He's worth ten of Tom, the fat hulking clumsy lump, the greedy lout! And how talkative his father has grown. My goodness! You can't get a word in edgeways when Tony's mouth is wagging. I cannot understand why men, when they are passing middle-age, get prosy. It's talk, talk, talk; all the day long. Their tongues have learnt the secret of perpetual motion. Thank goodness, I'm an exception to that rule. Otherwise, how you'd deserve pity. It's curious, I never was a gabbler; my mother always said so; and she was over seventy when she died."

Mrs Cromwell-Smith sighed again.

"We'll go and see Hugh. It will show 'em, and him too, that we aren't short-sighted mules and scandal-mongering rabbits. Cousin Elizabeth—ugh, she rides on my nerves! She's the very image of the Commination Service. As I said to my old friend the Duke on the famous occasion, 'Can you honestly respect ladies in elastic-side boots?' and he said, 'Emphatically No.'"

"I wish you had not sworn."

"So do I; but I had to. Their faces asked for it. There are moments in a certain company when to be shocking is to be pious. They looked so consciously virtuous, while thinking bad things of Hugh. . . . There's our train signalled. Drat it! Confound the punctuality of this line. In my young days the South Eastern could be trusted to be late, and trains were invariably caught. Now, you have to scurry and risk heart-disease—or miss the cattle-trucks. Excessive punctuality, like excessive virtue, is a vice."

"So is swearing," said his wife emphatically, though breathlessly, as they struggled into the railway carriage.

CHAPTER XIV

AN ULTIMATUM

THERE had to be an interview.

SIR Anthony sent his son a peremptory letter, to which Hugh at once responded. He was prepared to fight battles, a magniloquent way of saying he was anxious to "have it out."

The child of his adoption was left to the care of Mrs Stevens, while the prodigal, unprodigal, returned to a father who was decidedly not prepared to kill the fatted calf.

The interview took place at Mr Arnold's office. That was his choice, not Hugh's. It was an unfortunate selection for all concerned. The atmosphere of finance, at the best of times, does not conduce to the solution of domestic difficulties. Office furniture is always unsympathetic. Who can soften hearts in the presence of a copying-press?

Things were still in a parlous condition at Copthall Avenue. The market had for months been weak and unsteady. Wobble was the word. Sir Anthony, mainly through his exaggerated worries and self-inflicted anxieties, had not met his business troubles with the

confident spirit that hitherto had been his great quality, and was necessary to every capable financier. He had hesitated where hesitancy was dangerous, and had plunged when the occasion called for caution. He had, for the panic-while, lost his powers of judgment.

When Hugh arrived at the office his father was engaged with a client. It was therefore necessary for him to wait in the company of Saunders, the confidential chief clerk, whom he had known since, as a boy with a future, he had first visited the office, and wondered at the ledgers and the safe.

Saunders was a grave, grey man. His clean-shaven face, slightly whiskered, was shrewd and capable enough; but there was anxiety in the eyes, and some weakness about the mouth.

"How is my father?" Hugh asked.

"Not his old self," Saunders answered slowly; he always spoke with deliberation, as if he had to make careful choice of words; "he seems worried. I wish you could help." He looked at Hugh with undecided eyes. "He is taking things too seriously. I am glad to be able to speak to you. He has actually been panicky once or twice lately, and that won't do, really! I wish you could cheer him up. He thinks too much of the unprofitable accounts, and forgets the good side of the business. Nobody here can do it."

Saunders certainly could not.

"I wish to goodness I could cheer him up!"

Hugh realised, then, the reality of the gulf that parted him from his father.

"Do try! It's so important. If he goes on as he is doing, it will be—bad! The business is as sound as a bell. Confident clients, good connections, freedom from speculation; but it does not help for the chief to be worrying and out of confidence. He's not well. He's been like it for too long a time. That's it. That must be it; but there's his bell. Will you go in, please?"

Hugh, while not encouraged by what Saunders had said, was sceptical as to the reality of his fears. He could not imagine anyone determinately endeavouring to cheer up his father; and as for himself—a rebellious scapegoat is hardly a good gladdener. The only way for him to impart comfort was to invite the welcome due to a confessed repentant sinner—not among the possibilities then.

Sir Anthony greeted him with a mixture of gruffness and kindness. His eyes held a blessing; but his mouth—with its Arnold lip—was stern.

"'Morning, father. I hope you're keeping fit."

"Ha! Hum! yes, Hugh! Just take a seat. Fit enough, yes. Ah, my boy, we are going to talk business, serious business. You have done a mad thing, Hugh. Your mother is distressed. So am I. Your sisters, uncles, aunts, Aunt Maria, the Family——"

He paused, removed his pince-nez, wiped them

with his handkerchief, and replaced them. He put aside the pile of papers that had been before him, and—as in the earlier interview in the library at home—played with a paper-knife, and put his pens and pencils properly on their rack.

“You have—ah—adopted a baby!”

“I have.”

“Why?”

Hugh drew in his breath; nerved himself.

“I will tell you, father. It was my duty.”

“Duty! Duty! Whose baby is it?”

“I do not know.”

“Not know! Good Lord! Make a clean breast of it. Who is the mother?”

“I have no idea. He was left outside the door of my chambers in the Inn.”

“You swear you do not know who is the mother?”

“Indeed, I do not know. If I did, probably I shouldn’t have adopted it.”

“Thank God! There is no shame about it. I feared, I feared!”

“Thank you, father! I’m sorry you could believe me guilty of that sort of thing. I didn’t think you had changed against me so much as that. Mother did not so misjudge me, I know!”

Anthony realised his blunder. He was ashamed at having expressed himself so hurriedly. At the same time he did not see his way at once to disclaim his doubt. He hesitated, in the new manner; then gathering

courage, while Hugh, his eyes sparkling, waited, he said frankly :

"No ; nor I really ; but the fear has flashed across my mind, and it—it worried me. It was wrong. I see : it was something Aunt Maria——"

"I might have guessed that!" said Hugh angrily. "It's always Aunt Maria! I'm sick to death of Aunt Maria. She is always poking her nose in——"

Now the father was roused. The interview was becoming less smooth and easy.

"I'm annoyed at you, Hugh! So good, so esteemed a lady! She is one of the Family."

It was Hugh's turn to withdraw and apologise.

"I'm sorry I spoke so hastily. But Aunt Maria—well, mayn't we leave her out of it? This trouble concerns you and me."

"It concerns the whole Family. A Family is an important organism."

"I really can't see, father, how it is any of their concern. However, I won't beat about the bush or hide things. I'll tell you everything quite frankly. There is nothing for anyone to be ashamed of, except the parents of the child. Also I want to break down the foolish barriers that have been separating us — you and me."

He made his appeal with passion. He was profoundly affected. His eyes shone dark in a pale face.

"You may tell me your story!" his father said, judicially.

Hugh paused again to gather his thoughts. The seeming coldness of his father's answer caused him to determine to be easy and frank. He would make no more appeals.

"Absalom!"—he began.

"Absalom!" Sir Anthony repeated the word in his severest accents of disapproval.

"It was Roddy gave him that name. He's not christened yet, so far as we know; and we call him Absalom to go on with. He has locks of hair—yellow—hideous, that's why."

"Very well! Go on!"

"It was after ten at night. I had been to help at a boys' club in Peckham. I was sick to death at seeing so many youngsters rotting in the streets and round the doors of the public-houses."

"What were you doing in a boys' club at Peckham?"

"I was helping a friend of mine, a Socialist parson——"

"A Socialist parson!" There was significant emphasis on the intermediate word. Sir Anthony shook his head; his eyes gleamed.

"I had seen disheartening sights: a discredit to our civilisation. Boys in the streets whose homes were—not homes. I remembered the Dene, my home, and the ever-kind parents who looked after me; and was very sorry for all poor human creatures whose lot was unfortunate."

"Come, come! This is rhetoric! Live a little longer and you'll learn that practically all this trouble is due to want of thrift, extrava-

gance, drunkenness." Sir Anthony, the Family rhetorician, was finely scornful. "Come back to the child you—adopted!"

"I will. As I got to the door—the landing was as usual in more than half darkness, there being only light from the lamp outside in the quad—I heard a whimper. It startled me. It was so unexpected, especially as it came on top of my thoughts. I struck a match to see. There was a white bundle, the child. I suppose the light frightened him. The whimper turned to crying. I ran downstairs to look in the quadrangle to see if anyone was about; but nobody was about. The house was dark and empty, quite deserted; and all the offices were closed."

"You should have fetched a policeman."

"I'm afraid I didn't think of that just then. I daresay I should have done so if I'd been quite calm; but I was still full of the thoughts of Peckham. As the infant was crying, I took him up and carried him into my room and put him to bed. He was cold, poor kid, so I undressed him."

"Undressed him!"

"Put him into my pyjamas, got some milk and warmed it."

"Warmed it! Goodness! who suggested that?"

"Common-sense. Just Arnold common-sense. You would have done the same in my place!"

"Oh, would I, well!"

"I fed him with a spoon. It was an awkward business, and tedious. Also, the infant was hungry as a fledgling; all mouth like the hedge-sparrows. In the midst of it Roddy Brook came thumping up the stairs. So I called and he came in—and nearly fainted."

Hugh looked to see if his father were smiling. Sir Anthony was very far from appreciating the humour of the circumstance.

"So I should think!" He frowned as he spoke. Hugh began to feel despair. He was chilled. Then he almost laughed at the pathos of his father's next remark. "I think we need not let the Family know you acted as a dry-nurse."

It was the impossibility of this suggestion, this evidence, that he and his father were at such cross-purposes which roused him.

"The Family!" he cried indignantly. "What has—what can have—the Family to do with it? This is my concern! I am explaining to you who have the right to know; not to Aunt Maria! I refuse to care twopence for what any of them think!"

He slapped the desk before him with his hand. Sir Anthony flashed to answer; but he controlled himself.

"Go on," he said shortly. "I hope your friend talked sense to you!"

"Roddy talk sense? Not he! He's a journalist. He suggested that I should advertise for a parent—lost, stolen, or strayed."

"Did he? Good Lord! Ha! Your uncle is

not far from the truth when he says England is going to the dogs. He's a prophet, a prophet! Lost, stolen, or strayed! Humour! humour! And that—that is the spirit of the press! By George! goodness me! The future of England is unquestionably based on irresponsibility. No wonder the demagogues triumph. The contemptible scum! This age is rotten—rotten! Go on! Then?"

"I thought of Stevens."

"And who, may I ask, is Stevens? I have not heard of him."

"Stevens, Mrs Stevens is a her; our laundress, a woman. She washes, scrubs, darns, for Roddy and me; cooks when I let her."

"I hope she talked better sense."

"She did. She suggested to me that I should adopt him."

"Adopt—! Good Lord do we breathe? Really, really! If I talk—if—I had better be silent. The world is peopled with idiots, petticoated idiots, idiots in trousers, mumbling, mawkish idiots. Wait till I pinch myself. Good Lord! Good—Lord!"

Sir Anthony rose, walked to the window and back again. He soon was calm. His son watched him quietly, and then said definitely:

"I satisfied myself that what she said was right. I remembered the neglected boys of Peckham, and the other wretched parts of London where I have been. I realised that it was my duty and an opportunity. So I took

her advice! So many children do not have a chance. I vowed, if the parents could really not be found, that I'd give a chance to that one. Father, you really do not know——"

"What I don't know is nothing to do with it! Your follies I do know: and they are quite enough for the present. Go on with your explanation, your avowal of general insanity. It is—ah—absolutely preposterous! Brook—this Stevens woman—muddleheads! Why did I let you go? I—yes, I—am to blame. Your poor mother! I—I am to blame—not her! If I had had my way, ah!"

"My way is not your way, father. That is unfortunately clear. We have fought that battle already." Hugh's voice became somewhat louder as, finding the occasion becoming so unsympathetic, he grew angrier, more defiant. "My way is to help the helpable, to undo some of the wrong the present condition of things allows and encourages. To go by the copy-books is to go all awry. So, after consideration, I took Stevens' advice, and decided to adopt the boy, if nobody claimed him."

"Why did not Mrs Stevens adopt him, as she is so full of charity and philanthropic advice?"

"She is a poor woman, a widow, whose husband drank and was thriftless. He left her with little of her own; besides——"

"Ah!" an idea suddenly enlightened Mr Arnold. "Is that it? Can she be the mother, do you think?" Sir Anthony was hopeful.

Might not this be the way to clear the difficulties.

"Stevens? impossible! She is fifty if she's a day, and looks sixty at least. Ha!"

"Don't 'ha' me, Hugh, if you please. This is no laughing-matter!"

"I'm not laughing!"

"This is a serious business for you, I promise you: it is serious for all of us. Mark my words, if you adopt that child, I disinherit you. Just realise that!"

"No, father; you wouldn't do that! I am your eldest son——"

"I would, and will. You have done a mad, selfish, quixotic act. All your relatives, all the Family, are aghast at it—all."

"Uncle Crom?"

"You can leave out Uncle Crom. He is—eccentric. Aunt Maria, in a letter to your Cousin Elizabeth——"

"Oh, please let us also leave her out with Uncle Crom."

Hugh spoke pertly. His shoulders shook nervously with impatience.

Sir Anthony looked startled. A hot answer tipped his tongue. He paused in time, and thought; then harked back to the finding of the child.

"Was there no mark on the clothing?"

"No mark at all. There was very little clothing, and that of poor texture and quality."

"Did you examine it for a name?"

"I did not, but Stevens did. So did Roddy.

I left the job to them. He was looking for a strawberry mark."

"And you have not even the shadow of a suspicion as to who the parents are, or who left him on your landing?"

"Not an atom."

"Did you advertise, as your sage—ha, sage-green journalist-friend advised?"

"No. I talked it over with him and with Stevens; both agreed it was futile to advertise; no advertisement would discover the parents who had deserted him; but Stevens made inquiries of all the housekeepers, laundresses, and caretakers in and near the Inn. No one had seen anything, or could help. There was much waste of words."

Mr Arnold was lost in thought for a moment, pursuing possibilities.

"Is there a porter at the gate?"

"Yes, there is one in residence; but he does not see people come in or go out. His place is inside the lodge."

"So that whoever left the child might be an outsider, a stranger, anyone?"

"Exactly. There was no trace or clue of any kind to help us."

"Not even a footmark or a fingerprint?" Sir Anthony was sardonic. Hugh realised this, but was afraid to smile. He gave the soft answer which does not always turn away wrath.

"No mark of any kind. Roddy did some detective business, as he called it; but there was nothing to help."

"Did you, then, not speak to the police at all, or ask them to investigate?"

"Stevens did."

"You left a good deal to Stevens!"

"She talked to the constable who at intervals patrols the Inn; but he had seen nothing out of the ordinary, and could not help. He took down my name in his pocket-book—with a stump of pencil." Hugh was quite alive, with all his anxieties, to the humours of the case.

Once again his father rose, and went to look with unseeing eyes out of the window.

"That Stevens must be very stupid or artful," was his conclusion; "as for Brook, he is a pantomime fool, a slack-brained and fantastic fool. He ought to have lived in the days of the jesters. I can imagine him with a grin and a bladder. What will—what will the Empire come to when such as he is a leading Voice of the Press?"

"Roddy's no fool, father; please believe that."

"I will! And the prudent Stevens advised you to adopt!"

"I said I disliked the idea of the boy going to the workhouse; and she, naturally, was eager that he should not go."

"Oh, was she naturally eager!"

"The poor hate the workhouse like poison, that's the reason I know!"

"You are talking bosh! Bosh, sir, and drivel! The poor are too pampered nowadays, that's the fact. They have the wrong sort of pride;

it's the pride with asking pockets. Pah! I'm tired to death of the sentimentality talked by a lot of people who don't have to pay rates. But I'm busy. This must end. Listen to me. This is a very serious matter. It grieves me, it pains me more than I can say, to be harsh with you; but at this pass, there is no other way. You are priggish and headstrong. One would think you had been spoiled; but your mother and I have done our best. Well, you must pay for your folly, or do as I wish. Now, listen! You send that boy to the workhouse, or to some orphanage, if within a week you do not find the parents and make them take him back."

"I could not send him to a workhouse. I am sorry to disobey you; but I have adopted him as a duty, and if the parents are not found——"

"Very well, then, I give you one week. Obey me, get rid of the child in the only sensible way, and all will be well. Disobey me in this, and you shall not have another penny-piece from me till you come to your senses. Realise that! You can go now. Good morning! Tell Saunders I want him. Remember one week!"

The impossible had happened.

Hugh returned the good-morning, and thoughtfully went his way.

CHAPTER XV

A ROMAN FATHER

DURING the days that followed the interview between Hugh and his father, the Family, to its uttermost circle and the fringe of gossiping friends, entered on a pious orgie of correspondence, visiting, and interchange of opinions. There was no veiling facts. Hugh was thoroughly thrown over. The truth, not being disguised, was generally misunderstood.

It was the baby who damned him. To the resolutely chaste minds of the relatives, his connection with that baby could only be indecent. For a man of his youth and years there was no other reasonable explanation of his flamboyant fatherhood than — what, ahem, can only be whispered by proper lips into proper ears! Why on earth, otherwise, should he have the baby? Not even Echo could find a reasonable answer.

So Hugh was put without the pale; and the silver-framed photograph, which on a particular occasion had been prominent on the piano, was hidden by the fond and miserable mother in the drawer of her writing-desk.

Anthony Arnold, no longer ignorant of events and possibilities, ceased to be sensitive on the subject of his son's rebellion. He was, in truth, inclined to feel, unconsciously, even a little flattered by the turn events had taken, and was ready to shine as a strong man—he had tolerated no weakness, no!—to the admiration of the second cousins.

The Dene became, in the weeks that followed the interview, a centre of curious inquiries. Mrs Arnold, while ever hospitable, was studiously careful to keep her thoughts and sorrow to herself; but Alice and Elizabeth, out of their knowledge and charitable surmises, did their best to satisfy the multitude, who regularly took tea and talked with them.

Aunt Maria daily issued a characteristic dictum, and the Family, with three exceptions, echoed the declarations of the highly important lady. It was really Aunt Maria who was turning the gentle Elizabeth into a talker and a persecutor. She had joined the Philistines, and knew it not.

Hugh had ceased to be a hero. It seemed that even his mother deserted him. She sighed when he was condemned, and wished he would not brave his father. To her uncritical mind that marked him wrong. That was the domestic sin that could not be forgiven. She went so far, actually, as to refrain from despatching to him some particular and almost necessary under-clothing, which was already packed. She hid the parcel in her sitting-room, and, with moist

eyes, soliloquised in whispers of an obstinate boy.

There were, however, three who found something to say for Hugh, and openly said it.

One was Betty. Her brother's determination to win independence had gradually appealed to her, especially as she found Alice's want of generosity becoming steadily more mean and tiresome. The others were the Cromwell-Smith's. The Major exulted in outspokenness. He feared nobody and out-faced all. His reputation among the relatives would have gone for ever if it had not been for that carriage-ride with the Duke.

"The boy's doing his duty, egad! I'd lay my last doormat that he is! A better lad never was born. I wish I had him. That I do! Why shouldn't he keep a confounded child out of the workhouse, if he's willing to pay for it? In my young days, the poorhouse was dreaded by the poor, but—dash it all, Tony, you are an obstinate fogey—an obstinate fogey, by Jove!—no more pluck than a parsnip!"

"I beg your pardon, Cromwell," Anthony would answer coldly. He was amazed that his brother-in-law alone should criticise him; for Betty, of course, said not a word antagonistic to her father.

"No offence, Tony; none whatever, at any time. I'm a blunt soldier and my tongue talks truth; but 'pon my word, old chap, you haven't the courage of a kitten, really you haven't.

I'm talking kindly. To let your boy go hang because——"

"Thank you, Cromwell; that is enough!"

"Because he has the decency—the decency—to look after the poor and the lowly, and, like a good Samaritan, take one of them into his own care——"

"Stuff and nonsense, sir! Stuff and nonsense! 'Old fogey,' indeed! Pshaw!"

There had been many such little scenes as this between Anthony and the Major. The combatants became sometimes very warm and wordy; but their fervour was quite parliamentary, and they regarded each other with none the less kindness, with even the more kindness—because, in this crucial question of Hugh's liberty of decision, they found themselves opposed. Indeed, Anthony secretly liked to hear his son championed. He had come to yearn for reasons to throw down the barrier between himself and Hugh; but the means were not available yet.

"If you cut him off with a shilling, I'll help him out of my poverty. Eh? Won't we, Harriet?"

"If we may, my dear;" answered the good-natured aunt.

"No!" flashed out Anthony; "that I do forbid emphatically. I'm willing to hear you champion him. I'm glad to hear what you have to say, Cromwell; all of it, however much it may—ah—tread on my susceptibilities; but this question of finance rests between Hugh and me;

and if anyone—however close to us, however well-intentioned—interferes, it will be a mortal offence; yes, a mortal offence, I promise you! I shall never forget it, or forgive it.” He stopped abruptly, breathing heavily.

Anthony was so in earnest, he spoke with such evident sincerity, that there was only one answer.

“Very well; it must be so if you say so. We won’t give the boy a ha’penny while you disapprove; but, egad, he’ll have our sympathy; and to you, Tony, you unrelenting father, you admirable fossil with mistaken intentions, and to all the—the tabbies, I’ll give the rough of my tongue; egad, I will! As the Duke said to me—the Duke’s a modern Solon—‘There are times when a man should talk.’”

“Ha! that won’t hurt! You may talk, talk, talk, Cromwell, as much as you like. Ha!”

Anthony took it jocularly. Once again he had the last word.

Meanwhile, the remaining members of the Family were unanimous in expressing judgment; and Hugh, if words and wishes bore their burdens, would have had an extremely bad time. Whenever two or three of the Family were gathered together they discussed him, his projects and protégé, with consuming interest; and the less they knew about the subject, the more ardently and emphatically they condemned.

So every afternoon there was some sort of discussion in progress at the Dene, causing Mrs Arnold to grow more and more bewildered, and

her husband increasingly cocksure. His sense of importance, innate, but recently subdued or shrivelled, expanded again. Much of the pomposity, which business worries had curbed, returned to him. In the Family run, at all events, he was chanticleer once more.

This new attitude had its effect on Mrs Arnold. It caused her to forget that Hugh was a malefactor: so she promptly posted the prepared parcel, which contained a note begging Hugh to keep his feet dry; and in all matters of personal concern, whenever he was in doubt, to take home counsel. "Home-counsel," that was the expression. The good mother thought she was echoing some of the sentiments of her husband. The note was vaguely worded. Betty's genius had not been inherited from her mother; but it brought the balm of comfort to lonely Hugh. Miserable enough, in all conscience, he enlarged the meaning, exaggerated the burden of its kindness. Reading and misreading the letter, he took it to contain an invitation to go home and be comforted.

It was the afternoon of a Saturday. As usual, the drawing-room—which opened into the garden—was filled with an uninvited congress of the Family. It was unusually well-attended. Except for Tom and Millicent, better engaged elsewhere, every available member of the large and charmed circle was present. There was the babel of tongues with the song of the teacups, accompanied occasionally by a little piano music, whenever Alice was inclined "to

oblige." While she played, the relatives busily whispered: as soon as they noticed she had stopped, they severally said, "Thank you, dear."

Cousin Elizabeth, sitting on the edge of a straight-backed chair—she would always fight fate with an unbending back—wore her happiest expression of resignation and regret. Sir Anthony fussed and postured on the hearth-rug, where he was always most at home. The Major fumed in defence of Hugh, and twice retold the story of his ride with the Duke. To his credit be it said, the relatives enjoyed his narrative almost more than did he. They gave him indiscriminating attention, which he justified.

Incomprehensible, outrageous, saddening! These seemed the adjectives most favoured by the babbling throng. Mittened hands were raised heavenwards in protest, silver side curls shivered, elderly bonnets decked with unnatural flowers were sagely shaken, golden chains, resplendent on ample but agitated bosoms, trembled and tinkled, expressing the indignation of their wearers; and all the while, Hugh, the prodigal, was speedily travelling towards them, and bringing a surprise.

Silence, sharp and sudden, was caused through a question asked by a certain Aunt Emily, who seemed to love militancy so long as it was not suffragist.

"Anthony, answer me! This is a serious question. I do not wish to pain you or Catherine; but is Hugh quite sane?"

Mrs Arnold gave a little cry. The Major, in the excitement of the moment, rose explosively from his chair, indignantly to protest, and incidentally broke a teacup.

Sir Anthony was in a quandary. He gasped.

"My dear Aunt Emily—really!"

The lady fixed him with lorgnetted eyes. Medusa lived again.

"Don't stand and stare, man. Surely you can answer a reasonable question!"

"Aunt Maria, in a letter I had from her yesterday, made exactly the same inquiry. But I—I didn't like to mention it before."

This was Cousin Elizabeth's helpful contribution, uttered in a penetrating small voice. "It is sad, so sad!" she added, as suddenly conscious of her momentary notoriety, she sank, with back ever unbent, into the depths of her chair, and found she had missed stitches.

"Preposterous!" the Major thundered. "Gracious goodness! By all——"

"Pardon me, Cromwell!" cried his brother-in-law, who at last had gathered his wits; "I—ah—think I understand the spirit in which the question is asked. From other lips than one whom—ah—we revere it would be—what shall I say?"

"Don't say it, dear," counselled his wife.

"Oh, yes, I may. I am not violent. It would be—intolerable; but from the lips of a gracious lady, a member of the Family, it cannot be harsh or cruel. I will answer it. Emily!" He paused to add emphasis to the

words. The relatives listened with all their ears. "Hugh's conduct is inexcusable." There was a murmured chorus of sympathy. "Of that, I might with justice use, perhaps, a stronger word; but he is as sane—as sane as the Lord Chief Justice."

"Of course he is!" Mrs Cromwell-Smith agreed heartily. "The amount of nonsense I've heard talked this afternoon would fill a text-book."

She was very indignant.

"You're right again, my love," her husband hastened to declare. "If addled brains be the matter, they aren't Hugh's; though I, for one, won't say there isn't some sloppiness of mind somewhere in this Family. I never met such muddle-mouths!" he muttered, too audibly.

"There is certainly frequent vulgarity of tone when one of its connections speaks," Elizabeth, leaning forward, hurled this thunderbolt, her little eyes blazing. The "connections" was nicely emphasised. The Major, caught in the unexpected blast, collapsed. Even his whiskers seemed depressed.

"Hugh is as sane as anybody can be," Anthony continued, frowning. "There is no taint of that sort in the Family. How could there be? His parents, both Catherine and I, come of stock as sound as true British oak. There wasn't a crank anywhere. In mind, body, and limb we are unimpeachable. How, with all that, he can be so amiss in his behaviour——" Aposiopesis again!

"I'm glad to hear it," said Aunt Emily fiercely.

"There is no reason to be anxious as to his mind. When Hugh and I talked over the—the difference between us, he proved as sensible as I, though doubtless he said things which—ah—he could not justify. No; his main fault seems to be obstinacy, and, I am sorry to say it, fatuity. He is fatuous, yes, fatuous. 'I—a practical man, a man of Family—put the case fairly before him. I may—ah—even claim to have been eloquent. The holy calls of Family life will always fire me. I felt, when he first raised the banner of revolt, that the credit and good name of the Family were at stake.' He paused for emphasis, and then resumed in a low and earnest voice. "I might as well have talked to a wall or a door. I could not—try as I would—convince him; he had an answer, as glib and ready as you please, for everything. So to my grief and—ah—deep regret, I had to threaten to disown and disinherit him. It grieved me sorely to do so. To shut the doors of the Dene on my own son, it was—cruel!" Tears came to his eyes at the remembrance. One or two of the Family seemed to share his emotion; their eyes glistened. Hugh's mother dabbed her cheeks with a pocket-handkerchief. This was too much for the Major.

"My dear Tony!" he said, gently, "you are a man in a thousand; so good a man that it grieves us all, all, to see you in this ditch. But really—you must let me say so—I don't

think you are adopting the wise line, really I don't."

"My dear Cromwell, I am his father." The Family chorused approval of this. The Major was getting to be regarded by many of them as somewhat in league with the Evil One. This annoyed him.

"You are; and proud the boy should be of such a father, of such parents. But you have—haven't you?—quite an undue sense of the picturesque; and could not resist the opportunity to cut a tragical figure? No offence meant, my dear Tony; I never mean offence. Do I, Harriet? Now, please, please! don't get huffy!"

"Huffy?" echoed Elizabeth, shaking her head, and looking round at the others. It was a curious word to be having on her original lips.

Sir Anthony had grown grey with anger: his dignity was wounded.

"Your meaning is beyond me, Major!"

"That's because I wasn't metaphorical. As the Duke more or less said to me, 'Hyperbole helps.' My meaning is this—I'll talk prose for your good, and with helpful intention."

"Are not you in a draught, Alice dear?" Elizabeth interrupted, to show she was not attentive to her particular black beast. The interruption did not disturb the Major, who paused elaborately in order to display his old-fashioned courtesy.

"Hugh's wrong in going counter to you,

Tony; I'm willing to admit that, if he does it offensively. But is he not doing just what you would have done in his place, if you had his motives? If he is obstinate he is only showing inherited tendencies—inherited, by Jove; I won't add the word fatuity, because, though the military are considered not astute, I am a diplomatic bird. You—you, Tony, and he—are both obstinate as mules—a strange and humanlike beast!" He thumped the arm of his chair.

Anthony had listened to these plain words with impatience; but without offence, even although the Major was possibly going too far in criticism of the pillar of Family life.

"It is good for me to be rebuked on my own hearthrug," was all the answer he condescended to make, as Tobias entered from the garden with stately tread, and proceeded to smooth his coat against the legs of his master.

"My dear brother-in-law, this is a Family affair! You have bravely admitted us—us who uphold the dignity of Family life—to your confidence; and I—we all—admire you."

"Yes," and "we do," was echoed here and there. There was a lessening of strain; but Cousin Elizabeth still glowered at the Major. She could not forgive him, ever!

"You have proved a Roman father, Tony; but obstinacy—obstinacy—is still the word. Now, listen to one who has padded his chest in the service of his country. Granted the boy has made a fool of himself—as boys, men, all

except maiden ladies may do—can't you overlook it?"

"If he drops the baby," Anthony said firmly.

"Drops the baby! Dire domestic catastrophe! But if he keeps the dashed baby? What's the end going to be? Cutting him off with a shilling won't move him, I promise you. Are we to see him starving in the gutter with that baby squalling and calling him, Da! Hugh's got your qualities. He has a will of his own—perhaps that's better than saying he's obstinate. You have a will of your own, too. Supposing your father had threatened you with disinheritance because you had determined on doing a certain thing——"

"Impossible! the idea's preposterous, impossible!"

"But suppose it!"

"It's waste of time to make any such assumption." The blameless father settled his collar, pursed his lips, and gazed at the ceiling. He had become very impatient; but was not going to give way while the admiring, attentive relatives were present.

"But why? Why impossible?"

"My father was a model son, Uncle Crom," Alice chimed in.

"You blessed chip!" cried the Major.

"I honoured and obeyed my father," said Anthony. "Get away, Tobias! His wish was my law, as a father's or mother's wish—confound you, Tobias!—should be."

"My dear chap, you live in a world of copybooks—of green-covered copybooks with mawkish motives and morals at the top of every page. Come down to Mother Earth! If you were in Hugh's place, you would act as he does."

"I hope not, Major Cromwell-Smith."

"You would, Tony—don't talk to me like an epitaph! You would, because you are—and don't you forget it—absolutely the most obstinate person living. And your son is a chip of you. Yes, another chip," and he turned to look at Alice.

"I think we have heard enough," Aunt Emily intervened, in clear, cold tones of decision.

"No, let him proceed, Aunt Emily," was Sir Anthony's appeal.

"This is nobility!" was murmured.

"I'm always willing to hear reason, if only—ah—if only Cromwell would begin to speak it. This is, I recognise, a Family occasion. It would be a bad day for the future of the Empire if at any time, in the Family circle, we feared a little plain speech; though—ah—can—can—this be called plain?"

He put on his pince-nez and suddenly glared at his opponent.

"Don't be angry, Anthony, I beg you. I'm talking my plainest English for the good of the cause. I'm concerned in the Family honour also; I'm a member of the Family—thanks to my dear Harriet—a wonderful woman."

"Stuff, Cromwell!" said his wife.

"And because I belong to the golden group, I'm going to do my best by argument to prevent what I believe would be an unnecessary act of injustice on your part. You—egad!—some of you say he is a prig, fatuous, obstinate. I daresay he is. Aren't we all imperfect bipeds?—some ladies excepted. Then there's the baby?"

"What?" ejaculated Anthony.

"What is a baby?" The Major uplifted a forensic finger.

"That's nothing to do with it."

"Isn't it? Are not we, in all this talk and discussion, forgetting the blessed child?"

"It is unnecessary to consider it. Under certain circumstances, I would be prepared to help the intruding infant. I am—we are—not inhuman. The heart is always the centre of this Family. But when my son, my first-born—for whom we have made plans and sacrifices—comes to me and calmly proposes to adopt an infant of whose ancestry I and he know nothing, then I say 'No' to his request—No, with emphasis."

"Hugh ought to do as his father wishes," Mrs Arnold said softly.

"Of course he ought." The Major diplomatically agreed. "And his father really ought to do his best to allow what so steady and intelligent a son happens to wish. Isn't there occasion for mutual concession, for compromise?"

"What compromise can there be? How

can we meet half-way in the matter of this baby? That is the stumbling-block: he keeps it or he doesn't. There can be no compromise."

"Why not have the child here for a time? Judge the brat on its merits."

"Impossible," said Anthony, with shocked amazement. "Not for one moment——"

"Preposterous! It wouldn't do! What weakness that would be! It has no merits!" cried others.

"Regard it as possible, do; just for a moment. Don't shut the door on any possible solution of this difficulty," the Major persisted. "Remember the Family is not complete while Hugh is outside it."

Anthony came a step forward, impressively. He raised a hand; the thick gold wedding-ring he wore shone. The eyes of all were fixed on him.

"I said to Hugh, 'That child goes to the workhouse or you have no help from me.' He resisted me, refused. Now you say, 'Let the infant come here!' A calm request, Cromwell! By George, a calm request!" Anthony was very angry. He spoke almost with over-emphasis. "That child shall never enter the doors of the Dene. I say it." He looked about him at the deeply-impressed audience.

At that very moment the maid opened the drawing-room door and announced:

"Mr Hugh, Miss Cecily, and——"

“And?” echoed the father ; utterance eloquent in his prophetic soul. The maid had a sense of the dramatic.

“The baby.”

At once there was confusion of tongues.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PROGRESS OF ABSALOM

SILENCE as sudden followed.

Mr Arnold's positive assertion about the baby and the Dene was actually forgotten in the excitement of the fact. The gaze of all eyes was transferred from him to the opened doorway.

Cecily entered and stood within. She held the flounced mortal in her arms, and looked—Mrs Arnold thought—delightfully motherly. Cecily felt, in fact, far from delightfully motherly. The child had kept her on tenter-hooks. He would wriggle; he might squall. She clung to him and hoped for safety. There was a charming anxiety in her eyes. Hugh followed, and stared, surprised, at the large assembly. His glance clouded. He felt an atmosphere of antagonism.

"I had mother's letter, and I came," he explained.

"Mother's letter?" his father asked. "What—what is this?" He turned to look at his wife.

"My dear!" she exclaimed. Nothing more

was said, then or thereafter, of the misunderstood epistle.

"Sit down—ah—Cecily, my dear," said Sir Anthony. The old cordiality wherewith he had once greeted her was gone, though he was always kind. Her grudging independence and his own business worries had wrought changes. He looked round for a vacant chair. There was none.

"Miss Armstrong may sit here." Cousin Elizabeth rose, and looked significantly at Cecily and her burden. "I am going, dear Cousin Anthony, to the library, and shall take advantage of the opportunity to write a note to our Aunt Maria. There will be news for her."

Hugh opened the door for her, and picked up the woollen roll of knitting, which, in her nervous agitation, she had dropped. She accepted his attentions, but made no acknowledgment, and did not notice him. Loyalty to Anthony required her to be adamant and unforgiving. Nobody else went with her; but the episode had chilled the meeting. Hugh's heart sank; but being there, he was bound to go through with it. There was no seat available for him, so he stood by the door.

He felt the occasion called for an effort. He braced his wits.

"I thought it was as well that I should come and bring the child," he said. "It's best to be straightforward. I suppose you all know: evidently you do, what I have done. Aunt

Maria has not neglected me. Her admonitions generally arrive before breakfast. If I can come to any arrangement, father, at any rate, I shall be glad. That is frank!"

"I am sorry Cecily is brought into it," his father began.

"That is my doing. I telephoned to her at her office."

Some of the ladies shivered. Her office! A typist! They did not recognise women who earned wages. Cecily was not unaware of her present unpopularity; but of course she made no sign. She smiled sympathetically to Mrs Arnold, who was devouring her and her burden with all her eyes.

"I knew she would manage Douglas better than I—that's his real name, I learnt it yesterday—and I didn't want to bring a stranger down here, so she consented to come and carry him."

Cecily, not without design and diplomacy, put back the child's veil and removed his bonnet. The move had its effect. Douglas was the ordinary exhibition of his months; rather like a vegetable with staring eyes; but everybody was strangely curious about him: even Sir Anthony looked.

The infant, possibly because of the open Family stare—who knows?—began to screw up its flabby face and whimper.

Cecily thereupon took him out of the room. Mrs Arnold and her sister at once followed.

"His name was sure to be Douglas or Mar-

maduke," the Major declared. Once again he hoped, with tactful words, to build a bridge. "A peach to a peardrop the mother's a Cockney."

"Is she?" asked Aunt Emily of Hugh. "Who and what is the creature?"

Hugh looked quietly at her before replying.

"At present I may not say, though of course I'll tell father, if he wishes to know; but Uncle Crom is right. She is a Cockney." The Major smiled—I told you so.

"Well, there is a disgusting scandal in our Family." It was Aunt Emily who shrilly uttered the ominous words.

"No scandal!" cried Sir Anthony, the Major, and Betty.

"It's not dark enough!" said Great-Aunt Selina, confidentially.

"Scandal, great-aunt, scandal!"

"You will tell me presently that I am getting deaf."

At that moment, Mr Arnold's anger, fired by the anxieties of Copthall Avenue, and suppressed with difficulty during the afternoon, blazed into fury. He lost his sense of ascendancy. He forgot his dignity for the first time.

"You have gone too far!" he stormed. "After our last talk, this visit with that ill-gotten child is iniquitous—iniquitous and indecent."

"I'm sorry!" The culprit had turned pale. "I'm sorry if I've intruded without welcome. I

suppose I misunderstood ; but I had reason to think my presence and some better explanation would not be unwelcome ; so I came. I asked Cecily to bring the boy, because I thought that seeing him would help you to appreciate my point of view."

"Well, it does not ! I am ashamed of you ! Yes, I must say it ; you are breaking me. You will break your parents with grief——"

"Stuff, Tony ! Don't spoil your case with flummery."

"I insist on your being silent, Major. This is my house, my son—or he was. Your remarks are ill-timed and offensive."

"Very well, Anthony, I'll be mum ; but, egad ! I protest, I protest !" and so saying the old soldier, his eyes shining with fury, marched into the garden by way of the French window, where his still indignant brother-in-law could see him walking energetically to and fro, with Tobias uncertainly following.

Anthony, as the culprit was in the dock, and he was favoured with a sympathetic audience, determined to use the opportunity. He pointed imperiously to the Major's vacant chair. Hugh obediently sat.

"There is to be no mincing of words now. The Family expects frankness. I shall hide nothing of my opinions here. You have braved me, most daringly and insolently have braved us all, by coming here in the face of what I said. You are a vain and conceited prig, Hugh ; a pragmatistical puppy."

"Father!" Betty made appeal. She hid her face with inky hands and was genuinely distressed. Even Alice became hot and cold with a complexity of emotions, and began to wish she had not been so severe on her brother. The others were eagerly attentive all. Cataclysm had come. But still the effects of three generations of studied respectability kept the anger reined. Hugh, his one word of protest made, sat still as a statue, and looked his father in the face. He hoped to be able to keep silent while these confoundedly prying cousins were present. He would give himself away before them!

"I told you," his father continued, "with all the solemnity I could command, that, unless the child was sent to the workhouse within a week, you were no son of mine and that the Dene was closed to you. Yet here you are, and here you have brought him—here! Goodness me! Has anyone known anything so brazen?" He looked around the inert circle. "I tremble for the future. For the first time in the history of our Family"—its records began in the garrulity of Anthony's grandfather—"I see dangers, uncertainties, ahead."

There was a rustling of garments, expressive of sympathy. The atmosphere was tense.

Anthony pulled himself together.

"It is well that our relatives should know all," he said with some dignity. "In few families is there such bond of interest and — ah — affection. Until now, I have — ah — con-

siderately shielded you. I did not wish the disgrace of my son to become evident even within the gracious circle of the Family; but you have compelled it—you!”

At that moment Betty intervened by rising and going towards the door. She was very agitated. Her hair, always rebellious in its coils, was now defying all claims of net and pins, and hung in heaviness about her shoulder. It was not from motives of tidiness that she departed. Her nerves were strained by the wrangle. She was torn between devotion to her father and growing sympathy with her brother; between slumbering jealous dislike of Cecily, and a new and quickening curiosity of the creature—too young as yet to be called a person—whom that lady had brought.

“Where are you going?” asked her father, abruptly. He resented the gradual dispersal of his audience.

“Oh, I—to see the wretched baby!” and holding up her hair with a shaking ink-stained hand she fled, in her careless haste slamming the door behind her.

“That is the artistic temperament,” he explained, with some of the awe which genius may evoke.

“Why should any of you feel it so much?” Hugh felt compelled to ask. This emotion and excitement were distressing. “What I have done has been quite simple and normal.”

“Normal?” his father barked at him.

“There is really no need for all this confusion

and fuss. It is—begging your pardon, father!—absurd.”

“Is it? That has been your attitude all through. You do unspeakable things, and when we protest, as we ought to do, must do, you pooh-pooh, disobey, want to argue, call it fuss. Fuss! Well, if it is fuss, you will feel it. I said you should not have another penny piece from me if you disobeyed; and, by George, you shan’t! Realise that! You asked at the beginning of this rebellion to be allowed to feel the pinch, and to worry as others must do. That was ungrateful to begin with, considering all that your mother and I have done for you. You shall feel the pinch, and I hope will have your fill of it. The lesson you ask for you shall have. I hope it will do you good.”

Hugh rose and looked at the eager, unfriendly faces about him.

“Then need we discuss it any more?”

“Yes, we need. Sit down!”

“It only makes the breach worse.”

“Let it! You came here and brought the child, unasked. You invited trouble, and shall have it. Your aunts and cousins shall see what a poor exhibition you make of yourself. I blush for you.” The blush was not visible. “And why did you involve Cecily Armstrong in this? I’m afraid it will take some time for me to forgive that! I’m surprised at Cecily!”

There were sympathetic murmurs.

“She is quite undeserving of blame,” Hugh

protested indignantly. "What she did was done entirely at my urgent request."

"You would say so!" said Alice significantly. The Family pricked ears curiously at this promise of developments; but Hugh ignored her challenge.

Aunt Emily took up the running.

"How old are you, young man?"

"Twenty-six, Aunt Emily."

"Then you ought to be beaten."

Having said her say, the iron lady rose and walked rigidly from the room. Sir Anthony watched her go, a puzzled expression on his countenance.

"No, no," he said, when the door was undoubtedly closed, "I wouldn't say that; though in my boyhood had I expressed such opinions as you do, Hugh, and dared to act as—as brazenly, I should have been strapped. My father was a man of leather—ah! It was such men as he who made the Empire. It is such sentimentalists as you who, if you have your way, will wreck it."

One of the maiden aunts, softly as a ghost, glided from the room. Her departure was barely observed by Anthony, who still had the tail of his eye on the garden where the Major and Tobias seemed no longer evident.

"I am sorry I came to-day," said Hugh. "I wish I hadn't."

And well he might so wish, for his father, inspired by the hunting spirit of his audience, dilated fully, exhaustively, enthusiastically, on

the subject of Hugh's obstinacy, and the trouble and threatened scandal he brought or might bring on all of them, even to their uttermost limits. At last from mere exhaustiveness, not to say exhaustion, he ceased.

Hugh had been sitting without further remark. He was sick at heart. When Sir Anthony had ended his ultimate peroration, the room was in twilight, and silent as a mountain-top. Not a person but Hugh and his father were still there. Every member of the domestic gathering had silently slipped away.

"Well, well!" said Anthony, suddenly realising this. He was more than a little shocked.

Hugh felt suddenly sorry for his father, and understood the paternal standpoint better than ever he had yet done. But he could not back out: he had burnt his boats.

"I shan't trouble you again, father, till I'm sent for. I'm sorry it must be so; but I quite see. I am, perhaps, not as obstinate as you think; but I'm glad you're not helping me now. It means a fight. It will mean hard work; but I will make the fight and I'll pull through. I shan't ask you to help me, ever! Not a penny will I take from you, henceforth; and I shan't send that child away."

"Very well, then!"

"He is mine; I have bought him."

"Good—Lord!"

"But"—he spoke now with faltering, "you and I, father, may just as well be friends."

"Of course, of course!" Anthony forgot his old offence and looked with kind eyes at his son.

Hugh held out his hand. It was seized eagerly. They shook hands. Sentimentalists!

The father and son then walked together to the library.

The vanishing trick of the drawing-room assembly was explained.

Every relative, even including the Major, the only man, was in the library.

Mrs Arnold sat in the centre, Hugh's protégé — comparatively naked and completely unashamed — kicking limbs in her lap. She was dilating learnedly on infantile flesh, and describing the merits of divers soaps and other toilet requisites of infancy. Aunt Harriet was beside her, beaming at the infant, forgetful quite that he was the wasp in the marmalade. Aunt Emily gazed at the child glassily, in her mind comparing him unfavourably with memories of her own offspring—two gentle, frozen old-young women, angular and suppressed, who happened to be standing, satellites, behind her. And they had been babies once! Great-aunt Selina was vaguely wondering to which branch of the Family the new infant belonged. Cousin Elizabeth was the one person affecting indifference amid the hubbub; and the Major, quizzing them all, recognised the truth about her. Her ears were alert, and her eyes, though pretendedly bent upon the letter she had been writing, were generally attentive to what was happening.

Alice and Betty stared at the child with frank and undisguised interest. Cecily, in the outer circle, knew herself eclipsed. She watched the swarm with mildly satirical eyes.

"Hugh is ready for—" Sir Anthony began.

"The little man must stay until to-morrow," his wife at once declared, with an unusual assertiveness. "We are going to bathe him, and afterwards he must sleep; and then it will be too late for such a wee boy to travel. Come, Harriet!"

She rose with the baby, who rested contentedly in her competent arms, and led the way upstairs. Mrs Cromwell-Smith, taking Cecily's hand, went with her. Aunt Emily condescended to follow, her daughters with her; Alice and Betty, and the other aunts, cousins, connections, except Great-aunt Selina, who dozed in a great armchair, went also; and Elizabeth, who never would surrender—no! The maternal instinct has conquered. The child was tolerated within the doors of the Dene.

The Major turned to look at Hugh and his father. He burst into a laugh.

"In my young days," he began; and then—"Egad, that's the one thing, the only thing that never will be changed! Woman! Woman! Give her a baby, and she is—herself."

"It is marvellous," agreed Sir Anthony.

"What is to be done now?" Hugh asked.

His father looked at him with some uncertainty; and then, with a tug at the bottom of his white waistcoat, remembered his decisions.

"You must—ah—leave the child until to-morrow. Cecily can bring him back when she returns in the afternoon. You had better have a sandwich and catch the express; it goes in—let me see—thirty-five minutes. Yes, you will do it easily."

"Let him stay the night," counselled the Major, who, strategist as he was, saw that Anthony was in a softened mood.

"No, no, that would not do. What I have said, I—ah—have spoken. My decision must be adhered to. Yes!" He rested a hand in the opening of his shirt front, and appeared resolute. But his eyes, looking on Hugh, were more kind than for months they had been.

"Tony, Tony!" cried the Major, "you've the obstinacy of an Armenian mule, 'pon my word, you have! If Hugh were my boy—but it's no use sighing for oysters in Arcady. Tell me, Hugh—this is the mystery which clung to me in the garden. Anthony, your cat Tobias was dogging my footsteps like a purring bloodhound all the time. Tell me, Hugh, how on earth can you, a young man of ambitions, find time, inclination, and the requisite courage—yes, my lord, courage!—to look after that damp and smudgy, flabby dabby babby. Tell me!"

Hugh laughed at his uncle's way of putting it.

"It is all a question of management." His speech was very confident. "In the daytime Stevens, my laundress, attends to him, washes him, and all that. The mother also helps, and will have to do more in the future."

"And Cecily?" asked his father, with design.

"Every evening Cecily comes, leaving me free to do my social work."

"To your room, does she come?"

"Yes; she studies domestic economy, arithmetic, the poets, and, incidentally, is exceedingly helpful to Douglas."

"And how do you manage at night time, when the women ain't there? Demme, I've half a mind to worship you as a genius, or a sublime tomfool—same thing, same thing!—Tony, you ought to be aching with some sort of pride over this monger of miracles. We couldn't do this sort of thing in my young days."

"Pooh!" said Sir Anthony. He felt the Major's questions were dangerous as well as inconsequent.

"Douglas sleeps like a lamb," Hugh explained with curious enthusiasm. "He's a christom child. If he wakes, which is seldom, I warm him some milk—it's always on tap—he sups, and off again he goes like a top. He's a very decent infant for one so young. I couldn't have believed it. I manage him quite well. I expect he has to rough it a bit; but it's just as well. Mollycoddling is not good, even for babies. He's taught me a lot of things. Babies have tempers; they can swear and snore. Besides

"What?"

"A baby is, without any doubt, a mere animal."

"Good Lord!" cried Anthony, shaking his head. He had to walk to the window while he thought. Was Hugh blethering, or was he truly serious?

"But why not farm him out, let your laundress look after him altogether. This is a woman's business."

"I thought of that; but, I'm sorry to say, I couldn't trust her. She is really amazingly ignorant, and she might be cruel. Look here, Uncle Crom, don't you jump to the conclusion that because a woman's a woman, she is therefore a capable mother. It is not always so. It seldom is so when the women have to work. Oh, I have seen, I can tell you! Motherhood, in many cases, needs to be taught. The great majority of poor women are positively bad mothers. They mean well, but they do badly, sometimes disastrously. They frequently don't know how to feed a child. They would give it a piece of pork-pie or a wee drop of brandy for its stomach's sake. They can't properly nurse a child, hold it, or soothe it."

"Good Lord!" Anthony again ejaculated.

"And therefore, too many infant lives are negligently lost. It is ghastly! You just pay a visit, as I have done, to Pett Ridge's Babies Home in Hoxton, and see what miracles are done there! I know Douglas is better off as he is, though I wish Aunt Harriet would have him now and again, and mother too—though that, I suppose, isn't possible at present. Anyhow he is better off with me than he would

be with his own mother, that I know! I will give that boy a chance. It means a deal of inconvenience, and worse; but I'll do it."

"Hugh, you're a wonder." The old soldier squeezed his hand. Anthony continued to shake a despairing head.

"A prig," he murmured. "A prig. He hasn't the Arnold lip!"

The clock on the mantelpiece chimed. Sir Anthony put on his pince-nez to look at the time.

"Major, we might walk with Hugh to the station. It will do us good before dinner. Otherwise, I shall worry. Business as well as—other things, have taken to harassing me. I am not so young as I was. Things are uncertain. It is largely the fault of this wretched Government."

"Poor old Anthony!" said the Major sympathetically, as arm-in-arm the brothers-in-law walked into the hall.

That night, until two struck on the bell of the Law Courts, Hugh worked at an essay, which in effect countered, with something like flippancy, a few of his father's most cherished opinions.

He had to make a heavy fight for it. Independence is a privilege treasured by few who have it; desired passionately by those to whom it is denied. Hugh was willing to pay the necessary price for it.

Roddy Brook—nightbird though he was—had been snoring for an hour before Hugh

threw down his tired pen and numbered the written quarto sheets.

"Not a bad beginning," he mused, "for me or for Absalom."

Then he sighed a sigh which degenerated to a yawn, and languidly undressed his way to sleep.

A vision of Aunt Maria bothered his dreams. Gradually her features changed to those of Elizabeth, to those of Alice, to those of Cecily.

His dreams were bothered no more.

CHAPTER XVII

BY SALE AND PURCHASE

DAPHNE STEVENS was the mother of the child.

Hugh had discovered the truth the day before his mistaken, but not entirely unprofitable, visit to the Dene. And this is how the truth came out.

He had been at the Courts during a long morning, one of the learned auditors of a knotty case, the technicalities of which were of particular concern to him in the legal chapters he then was studying.

He had lunched at a tea-shop frugally—frugality had become a necessary virtue, the order of every day—and had hurried home to relieve Mrs Stevens of her duties—not unpaid—as the Keeper of the Babe.

He bounded up the wooden stairs of Stafford's Inn, after narrowly escaping collision with a fashionable lady, who emerged wrathfully, clasping some be-ribboned and possibly scented manuscript, from the premises of Meredith Macdermott, Publisher.

"An author," was his idea.

The impression was justified; for Macdermott

had followed her to the doorway, and catching Hugh's eye, significantly touched his forehead.

As Hugh was letting himself into his chambers he heard the child crying, and Mrs Stevens's voice.

"It's coming to something when I've got to wait on you. I always told your mother she'd be a disgrace."

That roused Hugh. He slammed the door to, and hurried into the kitchen. Mrs Stevens was aghast at the suddenness of his appearance.

"I didn't hear you, sir," she said. "The poor little dear was crying."

"I heard him and I heard you! Who is the mother?"

"Oh, sir!"

"Who is the mother?" he bawled the question at her. "Tell me! You know. Answer me!"

Mrs Stevens was cowed. She stared open-mouthed at him, and was so unnerved that Hugh thought she would drop the child, so he took him from her.

"Who is the mother?" he asked again, this time quietly. The tone of his voice was more terrible still.

"Daphie."

"I might have guessed!"

He carried the baby into the bedroom, and returned. Mrs Stevens sat on the kitchen's one chair, a corner of her apron to her chin. She was frightened, dumbfounded, in a panic.

Hugh was furious.

"All these weeks you have deceived me! You must have known from the beginning who were the mother and father of the boy."

"Oh no, sir."

"You did not know who was his mother?"

He glared at her. As Stevens said afterwards, "His eyes were like blades of lightning."

"Oh yes, sir," she faltered.

"And yet you led me to believe he was left at my door by somebody else, a stranger. You pretended to search for her; and asked the caretakers and police if they had seen anyone, didn't you?" The more he realised this duplicity the angrier he grew.

Stevens wriggled, and showed promise of going down on her knees.

The sight of the woman's contemptible humiliation shamed him.

"Tell me everything, Mrs Stevens! Take your time; I shan't eat you."

She gathered courage from his gentler tones. He leaned against the dresser, while she sat and gathered her bewildered senses before making the demanded explanation.

"Oh, sir!" she began; and as she gathered confidence, continued more speedily, "my Daphne's been a great anxiety to me. She's as good as gold inside, reely she is; but so wilful, so like her poor father—if ever there was anybody romantic, it was Mr S. 'E was a sore trial to all who 'ad to do with 'im, and she's 'is born daughter; there's no doing nothing with 'er when she wants to go 'er way. She's

like a stage 'eroine sometimes," she went on rapidly, "although you wouldn't think it when she brings the washing. But she's a good girl at 'eart: the prizes she's 'ad at Sunday-school, and the vicar, 'im as is dead, not 'im as is single, used to call 'er the daisy of our street. She was that fresh, like morning sunlight. It was the romance as done it. The novelettes she would read before she was so 'igh, and the talk she made about lords and ladies, it would make your 'air shiver and your 'eart proud, it would. I 'adn't any idea—not a thought, I adn't—that anything was wrong with the girl, my girl"—Mrs Stevens was sniffing tearfully again—"beggin' your pardon, sir, until I couldn't 'elp seeing; and then, when I 'ad to ask questions, I thought the poor dear's 'eart would break—she cried that 'earty!"

"Do you know the scoundrel?"

Mrs Stevens stiffened proudly.

"The likes of me don't have nothing to do with the likes of 'im. Daphne tried to keep it a secret; but I nagged at 'er day and night, hour by hour, I did, as was my duty to—wasn't I the mother who'd sorrowed for 'er from 'er youth up, and 'ad given for 'er, and strove for 'er, I 'ad?—until I fetched the truth out of 'er. There is no keeping things from me, when right's right and wrong's been done. No, sir!"

"He must marry her."

"'E marry 'er! 'is wife won't let him—as they say in the chorus; and there's no compensation

to be got neither, more's the pity. It ain't even worth goin' to a police court for an order. It's only Daphie's word against 'is word, the blackguard!—I've given 'im a little language, I only met 'im once; 'e swore till 'e was black in the face that 'e was innocent as a newborn lamb. 'Im a lamb! the nasty, lyin', 'enpecked 'ound!—dirty 'ound!—that's what 'e is. For two pins I'd 'ave slapped 'is cheek, but 'e looked vicious, that vicious; I thought discretion was better than value. But I'm sure 'e was the Wandering Juan, for 'e's just the kind as would ruin my daisy-girl. He shaves 'imself on week-days, and swanks at being in the Profesh."

"He's on the stage!"

"Yes, sir. But not an actor, no. The 'igh tragedians needn't shiver with envy because of 'im, the dirty tyke! 'Is job was to make noises off the stage and 'elp with the limelight and order in the gallery. Most insinuatins 'is manners were, when 'e liked!"

"So you had to take his word and could do nothing?"

"I sent him a lawyer's letter. Mr Parsons, the little gentleman with the golden side-whiskers and a slice off his nose, who lives next door to the public-'ouse with the broken gas-lamp, 'e did it; but it weren't no good, and I 'ad to pay the lawyer a couple of shillin's. They do grasp! All for my Daphie's sake, sir. She is very like 'er poor dear father!" She sniffed. "The dirty blackguard sent 'is wife to me to answer for it,

and 'er language was disgustin'. But I gave 'er as good as I got! That's all, sir!"

"So—to cut a long story short—you left the baby at my door."

"Oh no, sir." Mrs Stevens sat up, her sniffiness gone, and fixed him with eyes of virtuous pride. "I would never 'ave thought of doing such a thing. It was all Daphne's idea. I argued with 'er; almost on my bended knees, I did. She said you were crazed about children; said they didn't 'ave a charnst, poor little innocents! I couldn't keep the little darlin'—though I love 'im—'e must be sleepin' now like a blessed cherrybub, the pet—although I am 'is illegitimate grandmother, and Daphne couldn't bear 'im to go to the Foundling or the work-house, and to leave 'im in a railway-carriage would be so crool; so it 'ad to be somebody's doorstep——"

"And I was the fortunate fool."

"Yes, sir, meaning, no, sir. You were the kind gentleman as I know you are; and to adopt 'im as you did. I pray for you nightly, sir, on my knees, and the oil-cloth's cold."

"Thank you, Mrs Stevens. We must think of this. You must go home and bring your daughter. I must talk to her with you."

Stevens was momentarily aghast. She stared at the wall open-mouthed; her hands worked up and down on her knees.

"Fetch Daphne? She wouldn't come. She'd as soon talk to the—pardon me—as talk to you. She's not at 'ome, sir. She is a fly-by-night, a

gadabout, as good as gold inside, sir; but a little 'ighly flown and romantic, as that trial for my patience, 'er father, was before 'er. 'E was a plumber, sir, as looked too 'igh. She'll never be mistaken again, sir, trust 'er. Once bit, twice shy, is our lot in life; though I should never 'ave believed it possible that a daughter of mine, and such a dear, obedient girl as my Daphne—she looked like a Christmas number in 'er pinafores and ribbons when she was so 'igh—should 'ave been taken in. She was deceived, sir. It is a sinful world, enough to make anybody turn Salvation; and there are always blackguards prowling about, looking for lambs to devour, and putting troubles on the wings of the languid."

Hugh allowed the laundress's garrulity to exhaust itself, and then again made his demand.

"I must see your daughter. She must be here with you within an hour, otherwise——"

"Oh, sir!" Stevens was startled. "You wouldn't be 'ard on this pet. 'E loves you like a father already. I'm sorry"—she sniffed—I'm sorry I talked at 'im when you came in, but that was for his true father's sake, the swine! But really I love 'im partly because 'e is Daphne's, and I brought 'er up and sweated over 'er, like a sainted Gabriel."

"She must be here within an hour."

"I'll fetch 'er, sir. I'll fetch 'er, if I 'ave to 'unt through every music-hall and picture palace in London. Such a trial she is to my sore flesh."

She went, and did not cease her soliloquy of complaint until she was out in the quadrangle.

Hugh had much to think about in the two hours of waiting that ensued. He sat on the edge of the bed, watched the child healthily fast asleep, and pondered on the needs and possibilities of the future, as well as on his present duties. Should he now keep the boy? Was it right to deprive the mother of her responsibilities to him? Could he abandon him? Was it worth the price of the hard fight that was already beginning? How could he compel Daphne to realise her duties? There were many questions of critical import to the sleeping young gentleman pondered then; they needed disentangling, studying, settling.

In spite of his two hours' cogitation Hugh had not decided on any definite course of action, when Mrs Stevens returned with her daughter. The problem contained too many unknown quantities.

He opened the door to the visitors, directed them into the sitting-room, and lit the two lamps. He asked them to sit, and they did so, awkwardly.

Daphne looked white and very sulky; while her mother might have been the Vengeance of Respectability personified. There was a dull darkening of the pupils of her eyes, a setting of the lips, a heightened colour—she was red as the gills of a turkey cock, which gave the unwieldy lady an unusual appearance

of determination and character. Probably there had been battles.

In order to help them be rid of their discomposure, Hugh plunged into the middle of things.

"He's sleeping fast on my bed. He is quite comfortable. I am talking of your son, Daphne."

The girl looked at him. Her Cockney self-possession had vanished. She was uneasy under, and frightened by, the challenge of his words.

"Now what about his future?"

Hugh was determined at that critical moment to assert the importance of the fact of her maternal responsibility.

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Please yourself," she said.

"Ush, Daphne," counselled Mrs Stevens.

"You must take it seriously, you really must." Hugh spoke to her with most serious earnestness, leaning forward, his face white. "No one is blaming you now—certainly I'm not—for what occurred; but here is the boy; he is yours—yours more than any one else's; and I don't intend to do anything more for him unless I have a definite understanding with you. Is that clear?"

"No, sir; yes, sir;" said Mrs Stevens. She motioned vigorously to her daughter to be careful. Her face grew redder and redder.

"I'm sorry. I'm sure I'm sorry. I didn't know." Daphne complained; and looked down

at the carpet which she worked with the toe of her shoe. The cheap pendant worn about her neck dangled, shining, to and fro.

"Who suggested that you should put the boy outside my door?"

Daphne looked up to throw a glance at her mother. She brooded for a few moments, and then abruptly answered.

"I did, of course; it was all me. Mother 'ad 'ardly anything to do with it. Oh, she wouldn't: of course!"

"Daphne!" came the indignant protest. "I never did! Her pore dear father!" was mumbled.

"If it 'adn't been for you dinging and danging it into me that Mr Arnold was soft-headed about kids, I shouldn't have thought of it." Again she flashed a sharp glance at her mother. Her voice grew louder. "If it 'adn't been for you I shouldn't have done it. Should I? So there!"

Mrs Stevens wiped her lips with her apron, and looked at its greyness, as if it might be weary with the burden of tears. Suddenly the ice of Daphne's sulkiness thawed and broke. She was no longer an imp of ungraciousness.

"I'm—I'm sorry! I know I did wrong; it was mean and sneaking of me; but it was so 'ard. There was the little boy—my Douglas; God sent 'im! He came. It wasn't my fault. I couldn't do with 'im. 'E 'ad to 'ave a 'ome somewhere. Mother talked of the workhouse; first that he must go, and then she talked and talked of the shame of it if he did go."

"I never did!" declared the virtuous Stevens now passing to purple.

"And I couldn't do with 'im, I couldn't!" Daphne sat back in a tremble.

"Be calm. Tell me everything. That is best. I may be able to help." Hugh began to feel judicial. He realised what it was to be installed in the seat of judgment with decrees of fate in his hands.

"Oh, sir, thank you."

She waited a moment to collect herself; while Stevens, smoothing her apron with fidgeting hands, looked nervously towards her. Daphne seemed so young, wan, weak, and fragile, so obviously a fool, and a tool for the designers of evil, that Hugh could not help feeling pity for her.

"Baby came when I was staying with auntie. I didn't want mother to know of my trouble. I 'ad to tell 'eaps and 'eaps of lies. Auntie lent me her wedding ring to do it respectable. The neighbours took a great interest in me; they were very sympathetic. Auntie told them my 'usband was a purser on a German liner, gone to South Africa. I wish 'e 'ad been."

"So do I, so do I," chorused Mrs Stevens, recommencing to sniff. "P for purser: P for plumber!" she soliloquised.

"When I was ill, they brought me sweets to eat, and kept on slinging advice at me. Auntie told them to shut their mouths, but they wouldn't. If I'd done half what they told me to do, baby and I would soon 'ave gorn to

Kingdom Come. What an angel 'e'd make. The little dear! You'll be good to 'im, won't you, Mr Arnold?"

"That remains to be seen," he said judicially. "Of all the impudence," he thought.

Daphne's face fell. Satisfaction, born of loquacity, had been dawning there; now again there were clouds.

"There must be conditions if I am to do anything," he declared firmly.

"I'll promise anything!" The girl threatened to break down.

"Talk sense, Daphie!" Mrs Stevens spoke with shrill appeal. "Mr Arnold is a kind gentleman." She found an unexpected peppermint in her pocket, wiped the dust from it, and popped it into her mouth. It was comforting.

"That is neither here nor there," Hugh answered. He contemplated the women for a moment silently. "Now look here, Daphne, your child is not going to be neglected, and you are going to help to look after him. I may tell you that for his sake and my own self-respect, I have forfeited the money my father was allowing me."

"Oh, sir!—Mr Arnold!" they cried.

"But I don't mind that. I shall pull through. I tell you this, that you may have no false illusions. I am a poor man. It will involve a tussle, but I shall manage. But this you must realise — you, too, Mrs Stevens — if I make sacrifices for Douglas—that was what you called him, wasn't it?—you also—both

of you—must make sacrifices for him. Do you see? Otherwise——”

“Yes, sir; but if——”

“Not the work’ouse, sir! Spare ’im that!”

“Oh, it is you who would spare him that; for no workhouse would take him, with both of you well able to look after him.”

The faces of the women fell. Neither of them appreciated such practical reasoning, when it completely concerned themselves.

“Would it be difficult for you, Mrs Stevens, to have the boy at home?”

“It would, sir. The neighbours——”

“You could call it adopting him.”

“Oh, sir; they’re that artful.”

“They would say nasty things of—of his mother?”

“They would, sir; and of ’im, poor chick, and me. Neighbours are so trying, cruel and trying. I’m sure after all I’ve done; such years of devotion; and my Daphie-girl’s father such a reprobation, I should——” and so on. Egoism shrieked from the lips of the laundress.

“Well, that is a catastrophe to be avoided—under conditions.” He thought for a few moments. “And these are the conditions. You both must help me to save Douglas from suffering.”

“Yes, sir; oh yes, sir!”

“I will keep him here or elsewhere, as if he were my own son. I will be responsible for him; and, as well as my means allow, will look after his education. But every day that

he is here, Daphne, you must spend some time with him. It is for your sake I require this, more than for his sake. And, mark this, you must sell him to me."

"Couldn't accept a single penny—" began Mrs Stevens expansively.

"Sell him?" cried Daphne sharply. "No!"

"You must! I have a reason for such a condition." Hugh paused for a moment in full thought. The two women watched him with eager eyes. "I will give you a small sum, something nominal, say a sovereign, for him, and you will give me a receipt to keep—to keep in case you endeavour to interfere with him to his harm."

"Oh, Mr Arnold! as if Daphne or I would do that." Mrs Stevens once again fumbled with her apron, and promised to be lachrymose. She more often threatened so, than drew on the well and fount of tears. The sight made Hugh feel queerly contemptuous, and nearly unwell.

"Doubtless she won't, or you. In that case, no one will see the receipt, or know anything of it but you two and I. Anyhow, I must have it, and keep it as a safeguard."

"Any other way we could——"

"The only other way is the workhouse, and I should inform the guardians of the name of the parent." That was sufficient. The citadel of feminine obstinacy and small mean pride capitulated at once.

It was soon settled. Hugh wrote a form

of receipt for the definite sale of Douglas, the son of Daphne Stevens—he could not resist a little legal phraseology—and having the mother's and grandmother's signatures, as seller and witness respectively, handed to the girl a sovereign, one of his slender store.

Daphne's Cockney assurance, now that her fears were set at rest, had returned. Her eyes glistened. The features of her pale face lost their anxious sharpness. Cheap greed!

"You had better let me mind that for you, Daphie, love." Mrs Stevens smiled to her daughter, the smile that would be winning.

"No, thank you, ma," was the pert answer, "I shall buy a ring—in memory."

"Wicked waste, when the expenses I've had——"

Such was the mean whine of the elder woman. Hugh—his standard in these affairs was made of star-shine—found himself tired of their triviality of mind and complaining. What meagre creatures were these! His doubts were driven away. He was convinced now that it was his duty to take Douglas from them, and to give him a chance.

"It is Daphne's to do as she likes with," he said, with finality of decision. "He is her son. It is no good my counselling thrift."

"It shall be a locket, gold, in which I can keep my darling's photograph—the pet, the little pet! I must just go and peep at him, please, Mr Arnold, and see he is all right. I love him, the little duck!" She tip-toed to the

bedroom, and was to be heard gushing, and at the kiss-work.

Stevens, now in her turn sulky enough—her face was pickle-cabbage through excitement and indignation—rose, shook her head solemnly, and looked at Hugh. “So—so like her father! With ’er and ’im, my life ’as been a mire. . . . And I’ve got nothing.”

She even forgot to say good-night.

CHAPTER XVIII

HARD TIMES

FOR months and years Hugh Arnold had been longing for hard times, short commons, and other of the joys of the anchoret. Weary of the honey pots and cushions he had asked for want and the chances of hard life ; and now had both. He had challenged the Fates : they had given him all he desired ; with full hands they had poured on his devoted head the generally undesired. He staggered under the weight of their bounty.

But so he came to prove his mettle. Yes ; for he proved it. His aspirations had not been pretence or the fruits of moral indigestion. He had taken the hard knocks with a sporting spirit, and come down, right down, to bed-rock realities. He learnt some of the things which the down-at-heel daily know ; and although never destined to gnaw a gutter-crust for nourishment or to sleep in the Hotel of the Beautiful Star, he realised facts, and had some insight into the numbing miseries endured by the depressed many, who are nobody's friends.

He had his consolations. There were many

good comrades, Roddy their chief; there was his work; there were books, Douglas and Cecily, especially Cecily. She was a brick.

Every evening when the child was at Stafford's Inn, Cecily made it her duty to go there to mind and to mend for him. Without her Hugh's quixotism could hardly have been justified; with her he won.

She knew a deal about babies. She had none of that silly sentimentality which affects to regard them as better than angelic; but she knew their needs, had practical sympathy for them, and thereby scored over the many maidens who, in the presence of infants, gush, adore, and go away. The experience that had helped a parish in Grangeton came to the succour of Douglas.

Daphne proved impossible.

For a night or two after the exposure of her responsibility she had come to the Inn, and exulted in the baby, sung to him the songs of the street, nursed and coddled him unwisely, fussed over him foolishly. Her earnestness had then grown languid.

She failed to come on the fourth night; it was her Sunday friend's evening out, and two "fellows" were waiting to take them to the theatre. They had passes for the pit, and saw that rousing drama *The Heart of the Monk*; and wept an enjoyable pailful. On the fifth night she came reluctantly. Douglas was a tie and a trial; reaction made her "nervy." Losing patience she slapped him. On the sixth night

she gushed again, and brought the child a piece of toffee wrapped in newspaper and an orange. The next evening she did not appear ; and, ever thereafter, when she came, which was irregularly, she was casual and distracted in her attentions. She had other interests. Daphne was a failure.

So, too, though not such a helpless case, was Mrs Stevens. The laundress had an eye to her own interests, as well as a sniff ; so that all went well while Hugh's financial condition was stable ; but as soon as emptiness of purse was a confounded reality, and he, of necessity, must make some reduction of the extra wage paid for her duties as professional nurse, bottle-washer, and pram-pusher, the grandmotherly pride wilted and grew weedy. Stevens's content had indigestion. She looked heavily, sulked, talked at things, knew the frets of a meagre martyrdom.

In spite of the divers futilities of Daphne and her mother, Hugh, of set purpose compelled them, as much as he might, to share the troubles of attendance on Douglas.

The one member of the small household who really was not forced to endure privation, during that period of short commons and hard times, was the child himself. Hugh so apportioned the duties between himself and the others, that the son of Daphne was able to eat well, sleep well, and enjoy whatever happiness such a vegetable is capable of receiving. He, at any rate, lost nothing, however bare the cupboard might be. He developed into a finer and

healthier child than there was any promise of when he came. And that is all that need be said on the subject of *him*.

As for the good folk of the Dene, none of them visited Hugh. It was impossible for them to do so, as things were; but he had plenty of flannel and verbal comfort from his mother, and more infant's clothing than could have been used had Douglas been triplets. Betty, too, now and then, sent him the cutting of an article contributed by herself to the local newspaper, to show who was who, what was what, and how the world was moving in Chilston and its neighbourhood. She was "Felicia," a woman whose province was Books, Gardens, and Fashions. She also spoke to her readers with a vague familiarity on blouse-patterns, ecclesiastical questions, and not-too-plain cookery.

One day she sent him an account—not from her pen—of the marriage of that charming member of the highest circles of the local aristocracy (as the *Chilston Times* put it), Miss Violet Bellenden. Alice had scored round it a severe mourning band of ink. Hugh, remembering old teasings, sent a card in answer, to ask if they had enjoyed being bridesmaids. Alice, very sensitive, said his humour was malicious. Betty, with more wisdom, endeavoured to answer with verses in which Hymen was to extinguish his torch and Love to lament because of the jilting of Hugh; but the rhymes would not rhyme, the lines would not scan, the meaning would not come, and, altogether, the effort

was so stupid—the only rhyme she could find to fit Cupid—that the disappointing document was destroyed ; and the episode ended.

In contrast to the others of the Family, the Cromwell-Smiths were splendidly friendly. Aunt Harriet was a blessing undisguised. The Major became a familiar figure at the Inn, and swaggered along the quadrangle as if he owned it. He took up with Meredith Macdermott—"a wonderful fellow, has perception, egad, perception!"—and explained how much more prosperous and dignified than now was the book-trade in his young days. Finally, having climbed the wooden stairs, which he commended for their age and creakiness—"you hardly ever hear such home-sounds now"—he took possession of Hugh's apartments, dazzled Stevens, and rattled away on life in general, prophesying all manner of good—all blessings but beauty—to Hugh's protégé, the plain, plump, Cockney child, who would, he was confident, possess an unusual store of intelligence some day, because—because he always keenly watched him, when talking, with one of his infant eyes quaintly adroop.

"Horribly ugly, but bright," was the verdict. The Cromwell-Smiths were helpful.

Douglas, not infrequently, spent days and nights in their flat at Earl's Court, to the real, acknowledged relief of Hugh ; who, though no one in the world knew it, not even Cecily, found that the care of the child did hamper him dreadfully in his great endeavours, and

was a strain to his nerves, even heavier than to his purse. He was now actually in the legal world ; he was a hardy impenitent reviewer, and with his new boys' club at Stepney—Peckham had proved a little too far afield—was working nineteen to the dozen, like a Trojan, a drayhorse, and a shaven fanatic combined. But he would not say die, and was determined neither to break down nor give in. He was made of mettle.

With all the strain, he rejoiced at having been cut-off with an invisible shilling. He had gained liberty to labour as he wished, and was convinced it was worth the sacrifices. He was unspoiled by hard times and compelled himself to show a winning face—though still he had to do without the Arnold lip. He rejoiced in his ordeal, and took every disappointment—in the shape of rejected manuscripts, and there was a deuced many of them—with a determined cheeriness, which deceived all but Cecily.

Every month there came from Aunt Maria, in a wrapper, primly addressed by Cousin Elizabeth—she wrote like a meticulous mouse—a printed sermon, one of the outpourings of the Honourable and Reverend Gamaliel Seeker, which Roddy Brook declared was satisfying. That unscrupulous journalist, ever keen for “copy,” resolutely pirated the sermons, hacked them, transposed them, altered adjectives, inserted tags and verses, impiously ascribed to Confucius, Lao Tsu, Tolstoi, General Booth, Martin Tupper, and Pooh-Bah, and so improved

them that they became favourite passages in the *Saturday Mercury*, and incidentally enabled him to find means to take a charming chorus girl—she really was lovely with natural yellow hair—for taxi-cab rides to Richmond on the mornings of fine Sundays.

But all the same it was hard times for Hugh. His clothes became shiny at the seams, his body was thinner. Often and often he was forced to wonder how he would meet the next week's expenses. The unexpected bill was for ever cropping up: Douglas was the cause of many expensive surprises; yet, somehow, he always managed to squeeze through the ever-recurring tight hole. Guineas came creeping in from the oddest sources; until, with repeated close shaves and narrow escapes, his confidence grew. He learnt practical management in those hard-up months.

But daily he came to long more and more for reconciliation with the folk at home. He was very lonely; he missed the Family badinage and the teasings. He would have given a great deal to be absolutely good friends with his father. That, however, might not, could not, be so long as it meant abject surrender, as it did. Sir Anthony wanted the prodigal son to return with plenty of repentance. Hugh, although he enjoyed the husks, was willing to return; but he had no more penitence in his wallet than would feed a moonbeam.

The obstinate Arnolds!

It was an early evening. Hugh was revising

the proof of a review for the *Evening Mercury*. Cecily, not long arrived from the office, was making tea in the kitchen, and *pace* Hugh's protests on the score of economy, had insisted on preparing an omelette for the good of his inspiration. Douglas was on the floor, making pie with the contents of a waste-paper basket.

Enter the Major.

"Just in time!" cried Hugh, putting down his pen with the gladness of a good excuse. "Where's Aunt Harriet?"

The Major paused to put his white hat on the end of his cane and rest both in the corner.

"Spoiling the happiness of the professors, as usual. Such a woman for gathering knowledge I never did know. If she weren't a pearl of domestic treasure, she'd be a blue-stocking, a blue-stocking, egad: as it is, aha—her stockings are white—white as the driven geese. A wonderful woman! Treasure's the word; but her mewling of the 'ologies does get monotonous sometimes. She's certainly the better half of this old soldier. She leaves me behind, floundering in the morass. She is now worshipping the instep of J. S. Mill. Kick! Kick!" this to the sprawling infant who had fixed insistent eyes on a shining mid-Victorian watch-chain.

Cecily came in with a tray full of well-prepared kindness.

"Hail, smiling miss! Woman, the never-old! In my young days there could not be a sight happier than that of beauty bearing a tea-

tray ; and now—yes, now, Eve is transcendent still.”

“Thank you, Major!” said Cecily. “Your compliments are a model ; but besides being oracular, please, be useful. You can put Douglas in his chair—the right way up. Thank you!”

The meal was a happy one, Douglas not proving impossible more than once.

Half-way through, they heard the raucous cry of a newsboy in the Inn. “Panic in the City,” he announced. It brought the atmosphere of business into the room ; and they all resented it. The place should be sacred to literature, high-thinking, and tea.

“Drat the press!” cried the Major. “In the generations gone we could have a meal in peace without being worried by caterwauls and printer’s-ink. A noise-making, howling age! In the generations gone we made progress calmly, noiselessly, and still made progress. Now there is confusion, infinite confusion ; creaking and shouting ; hurly-burly, scurry and worry ; with a smell or two thrown in, and in effect we are as progressive as an earthquake! Bah!”

“Things seem unhappy in the City,” said Hugh. “Someone ruined, I suppose. But it shan’t spoil our enjoyment of the omelette.”

“Those fellers are always unhappy in the City. It’s their trade to be shaky and reconstructing themselves, confound ’em. They build a company on mushrooms, they blow

their tin trumpets with endless gas, they print prospectuses in the presses of untruth, they wear glossy frock-coats and curl their shining hair, they don golden rings, and show long cuffs wherewith to dazzle the public while picking their pockets; and then, off they go to Margate, and bang goes the tabernacle. I know! I invested twenty-five pounds once in a wild-cat scheme, just to see. It was bread cast on the waters, as your aunt would say. It never came home to roost. In the generations gone, the world of finance was sometimes as reputable as a bishopric; now—it makes widows and majors weep.”

“Your tea is growing cold,” Cecily reminded him.

“So it is, my darling; but the indignation of a veteran must out. And how’s the little trouble? Kick! Kick!”

The infant was inarticulately eloquent for a profitless period. It buttered its face, and swallowed.

“Well, I hope father’s all right,” Hugh said thoughtfully. He had been recalling what Saunders had said.

“Your father! My boy, there isn’t a safer firm in the City than that of your respected, but obstinate, dad. You are both of you chips of one block. Safe quotha? The Bank of England might be a broken heap of ashes, and he’d still be sitting in the counting-house, counting out his money. He is one of the old brigade, as am I—as am I!—staid, sufficient, estimably careful,

a man of men, my brother-in-law. But those others I spoke of, they are loud-mouthed rats, parasites with noses, trading on the innocent. An old soldier sighs for the moral stability of yesterday."

"You do, uncle; and full of eloquence are those sighs! All the same, I hope father is all right!"

"Of course he's all right. Stop that croaking, for goodness' sake, my brat-mothering nephew—kick! kick! As for eloquence, the truth is no less truth because occasionally it's talkative."

"Not always—in my trade, at any rate. I'm glad you think father is all right. That newsboy has put into my mind the idea that Saunders——"

"Saunders? Saunders? I know the feller's name."

"Father's head clerk in Copthall Avenue."

"I remember. His face was born sad. His chin is not over-assertive. He's not a very chatty chap, is he? Kick! kick!"

"When I was last in the office—oh, months ago—Saunders seemed gloomy and not too confident."

"That kind of man never is confident. The world of most head clerks is bound by the front and back doors of their employer's business. Its centre is a ledger in a safe or a petty cash-book. They have no vision or initiative. Their minds never soar beyond the business-entrance to the bank. And that's one of the many reasons why often England seems sliding to

the kennels. Its commercial clerks can only do as they're told. They are good enough to say boh! to a goose-quill—though a good quill-pen is hard to find in these smart days—and that is about all! I tremble for a manhood that is satisfied with the sustenance of a teashop. Thank you, Cecily, the cup that does not inebriate is most refreshing. Aha! Kick! kick!”

Hugh's anxieties were rather quickened by his uncle's philosophy, though there was no practical reason for that.

“Saunders ought to know,” he still maintained. “He was worried enough, and said father was worried. The months that have passed may not have mended his anxieties.”

“Tut, Hugh! Don't go blethering. I hate a croaker, one who runs for an umbrella whenever the sun is clouded. Your father—I know Sir Anthony—is made of oak, sir, tough English oak. It would take a very big panic to overturn him, I promise you! Mark my words! I don't read money columns, I loathe the sharkers' slang, and their cantango-rango-rigmarole. In this crisis—there seems to be a crisis, though why there should be I don't know—kick, kick! he'll choke in a minute—some mushroom houses, built of playing cards, may come tumbling down. Good thing too, say I. Some must suffer, but others will be saved. They are built on shifting sands and dishonesty. But your father's house, my boy, is safe as St Paul's. I know! You could as soon sink Dover Castle and the Admiralty Pier as sink him. I have ample

faith in Tony. He's a tower of honesty; is supremely capable; has means. With these qualities my old friend's financial stability would outstay Damascus. Of course he talks. He talks and keeps on talking; but that's a sign of strength with him. He is all right."

"Good, that's a great joy!" Hugh felt comforted. "Here's Stevens. She'll clear away and look after the kid, while you and I, Cecily, walk westward with uncle. Shall we?"

While he was talking Hugh opened the door to his laundress. She looked serious.

"You're not ill, I hope, Mrs Stevens, or worried?"

She wiped her eyes with the strings of her bonnet, and sniffed. Hugh felt impatient with her. He hated sniffiness.

"No sir, yes sir," she said, and handed him a soiled letter in a mean envelope.

"So like her father!" she said. She fumbled with her bonnet-strings and mumbled with her lips.

Hugh looked to his uncle for permission to open the note, while Cecily and Stevens, on domestic business bent, went together into the kitchen. He glanced through it, and then read it quietly to his uncle.

SIR,—You will be pleased to hear I am going to be married to a young man who is religious, and hoping to do well in the grocery. It is mother's wish that I should be settled, and this is a chance. His name is Mr Flower. I hope you will be kind to my Duggie. He won't be

mine no more, for Alfred will never know I've had a past, but I know you will be kind to the precious. Although the pet won't see me no more, he will have my blessing. Alf says I shall soon learn to pray. I went to Chapel last Sunday for the first time. I hope we shall meet inside the pearly gates. No more for the present, from your kind friend,

D. STEVENS.

"Duggie's ma! that's who it is, then! sweet child!" said the Major. "I'd like to kick, kick, kick—her."

Hugh called in Mrs Stevens. Entering, she saw the opened letter, and stopped abruptly, expecting a deluge.

"Oh, sir, I've no words for it. Daphne's so wilful. Her young man's very serious. He frizzes his hair and can sing for an hour without stopping. It was bound to come. It may do her good. Don't be angry, sir. After all it is for the best. That pound you gave her——"

"Yes?"

"She's bought her wedding-ring with it."

"It might have been worse spent."

"Thank you, sir, for taking it so. 'E's such a good young man, so 'opeful and proper. I've 'ad such trouble with 'er, the true daughter of 'er father; a bad lot, though a plumber. If only 'e 'ad been religious, like 'er young man. 'E would not then 'ave brought my grey 'airs in sorrow to the gravy!"

CHAPTER XIX

CRASH

THAT night Hugh wrote a note to his father at Copthall Avenue. It was brief and penned on the impulse. Afterwards he had reason to rejoice that he had sent it.

It said in all simplicity, "I shall be glad to be of service to you, if I may. Please remember.
H. A."

It was posted at midnight.

On the following morning, while Mrs Stevens, after doing her housework, was preparing Douglas for the customary constitutional on the Victoria Embankment and in the Temple Gardens, Roddy Brook came bounding up the stairs. He flourished a copy of the earliest edition—a special eleven-o'clock-in-the-morning edition—of an evening newspaper. His face was pale and troubled.

"Sorry to bring bad news, old chap! Read this!"

Hugh seized the fluttering sheet and looked to where Brook pointed among the items in the

"Stop Press" column. His heart seemed to grow numb as he read.

WELL-KNOWN STOCKBROKER HAMMERED.

"As soon as the Stock Exchange was opened this morning there was great hubbub and excitement as to whether yesterday's panic was to continue, or whether sounder judgments would prevail. Unfortunately, the worse expectations have been realised; and something like consternation ensued in the House when the hammer commanded silence, and the announcement was made that Mr Anthony Arnold of Copthall Avenue would have to make some composition with his creditors. Mr Arnold has been one of the best-known and most widely-respected figures in the money market, and his entirely unexpected failure promises more trouble ahead."

The face of the one was white with consternation; the face of the other was warm with sympathy. The two friends stared at each other. Roddy patted his comrade kindly on the shoulder.

"I'm off at once," said Hugh, rousing himself.

"Where to? Copthall Avenue, or Chilston?"

"I wish I knew! Roddy, telephone to the office, will you?—Macdermott will let you use his instrument—and ask Saunders where my father is at this moment; while I get a timetable and look up trains."

Before Brook could return from the telephone,

the answer had come in a telegram from Mrs Arnold. "Come at once. Most urgently needed. Father in deepest distress."

Hugh seized hat, shouted instructions to Stevens—which, received with open, stupid mouth, were laboriously misunderstood—and bolted down the stairs and into Fleet Street. He hailed a taxi-cab, and fretted with impatience, until it swirled into the yard of Cannon Street station. There, as luck would have it, he must wait twenty-five minutes for a train, so he sent telegrams to his mother, the Major, and Cecily; and arranged for Douglas to be fetched and taken to the Cromwell-Smiths.

Hugh's brain was in a whirl of turbulent excitement and of dark anxiety. Here was a new world, with many of its mountains shattered. Knowing his father as he did, the absolute uprightness of his life, his honourable pride, and scornful intolerance of failure, he realised something of the heaviness and bitterness of this shattering blow. Sir Anthony a bankrupt! Composition with his creditors!

Hugh tried to force his ideas into train, but his pell-mell thoughts would wander. He was groping for the right way. He thought of his mother, sisters, Tom. What havoc this disaster would bring to their ordered life; and worse, far worse, would be the effect on his father. Sir Anthony's sound position, his reputation for solvency in mind, condition, and estate; these were matters of outspoken family

pride, and now they were shattered. He had been the hub of that wide circle of admiring relatives, an oracle and prophet, a magnate of the City, and now the illusion was burst, as if it had been an illusion, a bubble—as it had not been.

These thoughts, rambling, involved, often inconsequent, spurred Hugh's impatience. Never was train so slow as that one seemed to be. He realised that, with his trained and legal mind, he should be putting projects into form and order; but no plans could be made till he fully knew the facts and their particulars; meanwhile, there were sickening anxieties and a growing dread. He knew nothing but the bare circumstances of the acknowledged insolvency, information shared with all the world that read an evening paper. The remembrance of this publicity threw back his thoughts to his beaten father; and so the maddening wheel of trouble and worry, of fear and conjecture, went round and round and round persistently, in his brain.

In the futility of waiting, his thoughts reverted to that other bankrupt, Mr Sedley. He came to wonder how his father would face the creditors, and how the world would treat him. It was that which troubled him as much as the fact of bankruptcy. He realised, with filial pride—tears choked his throat as he thought it—that Sir Anthony was no Sedley; yet, was his father so strong a man? Was his aspect of strength really an aspect of strength, or did it cover

weakness? Hugh had always been observant of his father's words and methods; but had never analysed them till now. He involuntarily found himself pondering in this manner whilst he needs must wait.

New doubts, multitudinous, raised their poisonous heads. He hated the thoughts, but, in the strain and dread of that train-ride of anxiety, could not help thinking them. Catastrophe was shaking his aspect of the world; and under the shock the established faith in his father's strength of personality trembled. Then the old sense of championship revived. He shook himself, as though to be rid of the shadowy torment that squatted on his shoulders, and declared to himself, he is strong. He has always been strong! His father would not take defeat with meekness or weakness! Sir Anthony would rather have died—would rather die at the thought. Would rather die!

Hugh's anxieties were quickened almost to a maddening intensity. New fears, morbid fears, assailed him. Anxieties rode on the winged horses of fear. So the wheel of his mind went persistently round and round, profitlessly on and on.

At the back of Hugh's fears there lurked and grew a horrid dread. Had he in some measure brought this catastrophe to pass? Had he in some way failed his father? His vanity, his satisfaction, were assailed. He shook the doubts away; but, remorselessly, they returned. He could not be rid of the many elements of his depressing disquietude.

"Pray God I am in time!" he thought again, again, and all the while the train was speeding with tantalising leisureliness to Chilston. "I will help now. I will help now," was all the comfort he could get. His conscience was quickened and clamouring.

That half-hour in the railway carriage was the longest and slowest thirty minutes of his life.

The motor was waiting for him at the station; and Betty, wild-eyed, untidy, and white, was with it. She called to him impatiently; and, unlike her usual self, kissed him impulsively. He was not unaffected by her energy of emotion.

"Cheer up! Tell me all about it," he said, as he squeezed her arm. "How's father? Full speed ahead, Travers, for heaven's sake."

The time Travers took to start!

While the car sped up the hill—it was not in the first-class as a climber—Betty told her story. She clutched Hugh's hand; and spoke hurriedly. Her words were outpoured. The girl was changed. She had passed the stage of literary affectations, and was newly touched by life.

"Father came home last night, and we knew something had happened. He was pale as death, and horribly quiet. He just sat and looked at us, and moped. He had lost all confidence. It wasn't like father a bit. At last mother asked him what was the matter, and he said, without any of his spirit, "Nothing,

nothing"; and then, all of a sudden, got up and walked into the library. We heard him close and lock the door. Alice, who had been out with Truby, and still had her walking-things on, sat down and fainted. That did mother good. It kept her from going off herself. We were distracted. We listened at the door. Father was walking up and down, up and down. I said to mother, 'Let us wire for Hugh,' and she said, 'Not yet, we don't know what's the matter. Perhaps he's ill. I'll go and see.' So while I took Alice upstairs and put her to bed, mother went to see. She knocked and knocked; but father only said, 'Go away;' and, although she begged and prayed him to let her in, he still only said, 'Go away.'"

"Angrily did he say it—with spirit?"

"No; but as if he was tired, as if he was broken. It was not like father."

"Go on!"

"Dinner was served as usual. None of us dressed. Fortunately Tom and Millicent are staying with the Embridges, so they have known nothing about it, and were out of the way. We took a tray up to him, knocked, and left it outside the library door; and then went away. Mother cried for a bit."

"It's a rotten business!"

"Half an hour afterwards father came to us—we two were alone—in the dining-room. He thanked us for our love"—Betty herself now began to talk with moistened eyes—"said he'd

had a great misfortune, a great blow, but we must be strong. He seemed very brave and collected, but he looked so tired and white and old: he had aged years. Mother kissed him, and asked him to go to bed and rest. He shook his head and smiled without smiling, and said that we were at once, at once, to go to bed and leave him, as he had a great deal to attend to in the library. As he was going back, mother asked him if he had eaten the dinner. He said 'Yes, thank you,' in a far-away voice—as if his thoughts were far away."

"Poor Betty. I wish I'd known." Hugh was touched by the sight of the strain evident in his sister's face.

"It was too late to wire to you, and you aren't on the telephone; so mother said, 'Let us wait till to-morrow,' and I didn't know what to do. Well, father went back to the library and again locked himself in. We waited a little time and then crept along. It was all quite still. He was not walking about any longer, and the tray was inside, he had taken it in; so we felt less anxious about him and went upstairs to the bedroom. I said I'd sleep with mother for company. We both undressed, but could not even get into bed. We put on our dressing-gowns and waited. We heard the servants lock the outer doors and go to bed. They crept about: it was ghostly. Then we went downstairs and sat in the hall, in the darkness. Mother thought it best to put out the lights. We sat there the whole night."

"Good Lord! Peg away, Travers!" Hugh called, "It's so urgent."

"I know, sir, I know!" cried the chauffeur, whose frown of determination deepened.

"We did not dare to disturb him again, but watched the crack of light under the door. The only sound we heard him make during the live-long night was when he opened, and later closed, the balcony-window."

"For air!"

"I suppose so—it was hot enough."

"And this morning?"

"We knocked as soon as it was light. Oh, Travers, do go on!"

"The car's doing her best, miss."

"Yes," Hugh reminded her, "You knocked?"

"Father did not answer for a long time. Then he opened the door, and seeing us in our dressing-gowns stared blindly, as if he was dazed. Mother put her arms round his neck and kissed him, and nearly cried, I know. He patted her shoulder, and said, 'It's all right, Kit; it's all right.' She begged him to come to bed. He said 'Bed?' and seemed surprised and confused. Then he sort of shook himself, and got stern and said, 'No, leave me alone. I've letters to write, urgent letters; and other things to do.' Mother broke into crying, and I begged him to go to the bedroom with her; but again he answered gruffly, and said he was not to be disturbed. He added that when he wanted anything he'd ring; then he shut and locked the door. We made some tea, and I took a cup to

Alice ; but she was fast asleep. I got mother to lie down in the drawing-room, and while she rested I wrote letters to Uncle Crom and to you, asking you both to come."

"And since then?"

"Nothing has happened. Mother has knocked and waited. We took up some breakfast to him ; but he would not even take in the tray."

At that moment the top of the long Chilston Hill was reached, and Travers was able to let the car go at a speed that was comforting.

"Thank goodness!"

"At ten o'clock Aunt Harriet telephoned for news. Although she knew nothing, they were both very anxious. Just after that Cousin Elizabeth arrived with all sorts of inquiries from Aunt Maria ; she counselled us to send Travers to the post-office with a telegram for you."

"Cousin Elizabeth did!"

"Yes. She is not so bad."

"And Alice, what of her?"

"Quite done up. The poor thing's a rag. She is not used to trouble. She fears the worst. She got up, but we made her go to bed again ; and to get Cousin Elizabeth out of the way I asked her to act as her nurse. Here we are ! There's mother!"

Hugh saw a white face at the gate. He stood and waved his hat ; and before the car had stopped, had sprung out and was embracing his mother.

"Oh Hugh, Hugh," she cried.

"All right, mother. I'll go to father."

"I am so frightened," she whispered, clinging to him, as Betty running after them, they hurried up the drive. Hugh held his mother's arm.

"No fear for that," so giving half expression to his own fears. "It's a great catastrophe, I know; but——"

"What exactly is it, Hugh?"

"Don't you know?"

"Tell me; tell me."

Hugh thought a moment. "Father's a bankrupt," he said.

"Go to him," she answered; but very quietly, "I'm so frightened."

"No need for that. Father's sound."

"Yes, yes; but all night——"

"I know. Betty has told me everything."

"Not everything, my dear. Father's been up all night, and—he's got a revolver." The words came pat—never before came words so pat from the good lady's lips.

A shock tore its way throughout Hugh's being. It was as if his worst fears were on the moment to be realised. He recalled the scene in the library on the day when his freedom was granted. The revolver had then been lying on the side-table. He dreaded—he feared to give expression to his dread. Was he too late?

He sprang up the steps, up the few additional stairs to the first floor. His heart was beating wildly; but with the need for action, a new

strength, a new sense of caution and calm, had come.

Most gently, without a sound, he tried the library door handle.

His mother and Betty had slowly followed, and were waiting behind him, watching him breathlessly. The door was locked still. The electric light within the room was not extinguished. He paused in thought, for the tithe of a second; and forthwith determined on a course of action.

"Stay here," he whispered, "mother, sit and rest. Betty, you move about. Make a noise, not too much noise; but enough to be heard."

That said, he dashed down the steps and out into the garden. He was, without question, frightened.

"The revolver! The revolver!"

The fact of the tragic danger had become a rhythmic burden to his brain. Like the motion of an intolerable machine, the words repeated themselves.

"The revolver! The revolver! The revolver!"

CHAPTER XX

FATHER AND SON

TRAVERS had taken the motor-car round to the coach-house. With oil-can in hand and a smudgy rag, he was giving "her" the ordinary, necessary, affectionate attention, when Hugh called to him to bring some sort of a ladder speedily.

The chauffeur, who seemed fully to share the Family's anxieties, forthwith dropped his present occupation and hurried to obey. Hugh ran back to take post beneath the library window, and, while waiting for Travers, took off his boots.

The ladder was placed against the balcony. Hugh crept up. A little knot of four servants was gathered on the lawn, watching and whispering. Tobias, all unconcerned, rubbed his fur against cook's skirt.

Hugh stepped over the rail and crouched outside the French window, kneeling. A curtain was drawn half-way across. Anxiously and breathlessly he peered within.

A wave of relief surged through him. His father, as yet, was safe, and entirely unconscious

of the approaching interruption. Hugh could see him, in his shirt sleeves and ruffled white waistcoat, bending over the desk, writing busily, writing without pause. Hugh collected himself. Here was need for nerve and wits.

The glass door to the balcony was shut ; but the window adjoining, though closed, was unlatched. Anthony Arnold when opening it for air in the night, and shutting it afterwards, had naturally neglected to re-latch it. That was a good happening.

Hugh waited : then again he peeped within. He could see his father still at work. The white head was bent over documents. His presence on the balcony was, fortunately, unsuspected.

He raised a hand and endeavoured to push up the window. It creaked. His father looked up. Hugh hesitated no longer. He stood up boldly, and, exerting all his strength, flung open the window.

Mr Arnold rose from his chair. His face, before weary and livid, was suddenly flushed with anger. His eyes burned with dark light.

Hugh vaulted over the window-ledge, and sat on the sill. He saw an object, ominous, that lay at the side of the desk. It was the revolver. Anthony Arnold dropped a handkerchief over it. The father and son stared at each other in silence, waiting to speak.

The old habitudes re-asserted themselves. Anthony puffed out his cheeks, pulled at the

base of his waistcoat, smoothed his hair. Even yet he was chanticleer.

"Well?" at last he asked. "How — how dare you?" There was bitter abruptness in the tone.

Hugh heard his mother and sister softly turning the handle of the door.

"It's all right, father. You need me, and I've come."

He spoke with business-like abruptness. The old hesitancy was gone.

Anthony Arnold returned to his chair at his desk. He did not remove his eyes from Hugh, who watched him closely. Not for a breathing moment did he lose thought of the danger hidden by the handkerchief.

"I don't need you. I have given you up. Clear out!" The abruptness and emphasis were as bitter as the words.

"I will not do anything of the kind!"

"You will obey me!"

"My duty is here!"

"Your duty is to obey your father. I insist on your going. I forbade you the house."

"That is all over." Hugh spoke with a new masterfulness. "You are in trouble; I'm your eldest son; my place is here. I am not the weakling I was, father. You have got to trust me."

"Trust you!"

The son shivered at the quiet scorn in his father's voice. Such contempt, if the tone were intentional, was unlike Sir Anthony; but he

was distraught, his nerves were strained, his mind was almost beyond his governing. "I can help you."

Hugh's voice trembled with eagerness and deep feeling. This was the crisis of his life: the ordeal of his manhood. He was being tested, and would prove true.

"You help me!" again there was irony in the tone. "You, my boy, can help no one." This was said more kindly. "You might have done so, had you obeyed and done as I wished—as-I-wished!"

"What?"

"Studied, followed the rules, become a barrister."

"I am a barrister." That was Hugh's trump-card. His eyes shone as he played it.

"What's that?" The question was asked sharply. Anthony looked at his son with tired and curious eyes, as though he were forcing a tired intellect to understand.

"I was called some weeks ago. Since I've been alone I have worked. I hoped you would have heard, would have seen my name in the lists. I passed with honours. I did not care to tell you, as things were. It would have looked like cock-crowing. I worked hard for it." He paused for a moment, and then added wistfully, "I hope you may yet be proud of me."

At last Sir Anthony fully comprehended his son's triumph. He looked at him now with eyes that glistened.

"It is too late!" The words slipped out. They were heavy with weariness.

"It is never too late," Hugh answered, with confidence.

Anthony was visibly impressed by the strength and new-found courage of his son.

"You can trust me now, father. You can let me help you to get out of these tangles. They are merely temporary."

"Temporary! I wish they were. It is too late." The words were very weary.

Suddenly the father collapsed, leaned forward on the desk, and hid his face in his hands. The handle of the door was again being turned silently, ineffectively. Hugh would have gone to the door to let in his mother and sister; but with the revolver in its dangerous place, dared not move.

His father looked up suddenly. "I'm proud of you, my boy." There were tears in his eyes.

"Oh, thank you, father, that's all right!" said Hugh.

"I suppose you have justified your independence"—Anthony was now horribly meek—"and that I was—ah—obstinate and wrong—"

"No, no!" interjected Hugh, all anxious to save.

"But now—believe me!—you cannot help. Things have gone beyond your power or mine. It is good of you to come;—I'm proud of you—but it is too late. I am ruined, absolutely ruined. There is only one way."

He seemed to be talking to himself; and as

he spoke, with business-like, habitual hands he put into more and still more orderly sequence the neat tape-tied bundles of papers confronting him."

"There is only one way!"

Again he realised himself, rose, stretched his arms wearily. Hugh was pained to see how old and ill he looked. The catastrophe had aged him almost terribly.

The door-handle was once again gently tried.

"It is a hard way; no doubt, a very hard way; but—honourable." Hugh, still sitting against the window-sill, ventured to declare.

"It is a hard way," his father echoed, and then weakly resumed his seat. Suddenly he braced himself to action.

"Go, Hugh, to your mother," he commanded. "Oh, the door's locked. Unlock it please, and tell your mother——"

"No," said Hugh, sharply. "I will not leave you."

"Eh?" cried the other, jumping to his feet and fisting the desk passionately. "Confound you, sir! Am I to be ruled by you? Do as I command you—command you!"

"I will not. I am sorry to disobey you, father; but I will not."

"Why not?" The question was roared out. Sir Anthony glared. He was beside himself with rage.

"I will not say." The words were spoken quietly.

Hugh's firmness, force, brevity of speech,

calmness were compelling. His father weakened as rapidly as he had been roused. He laid a hand upon the covered pistol.

"Don't touch it!" The words were on Hugh's lips, but he controlled himself, said nothing. He managed to restrain himself in time.

"The Family honour," was all that he said. Deliberately he emphasised the executive words.

Sir Anthony was hit. It was as if those suggestive words had struck his heart. He sat down again gasping.

"The Family; the Family," he groaned to himself; and surrendering, with the passion of weakness, flung down his head on his folded arms.

Hugh hurried across to him, obtained unchallenged possession of the revolver, and put it, still covered with the handkerchief, into his pocket.

His father had no more power of resistance.

The door unlocked, the wife and daughter came in. Betty's eyes were glowing with relief and gladness.

Mrs Arnold went straight to her husband, knelt beside him, put an arm about his neck, kissed his white head, and wept helpfully. Half turning in his chair, he gathered her to him.

Hugh, hurrying downstairs in his stockinged feet, almost ran into the arms of the Major, who was standing, talking, with Cousin

Elizabeth. In their common anxiety feuds were forgotten. The hatchet was buried. The great trouble, which, through Anthony's misfortunes, had fallen on the Family, had caused them to forget minor differences and prejudices, and to realise their relationship.

They caught Hugh by the arm, and breathlessly asked questions.

He put his hands in his coat pockets completely to hide the dark evidence there, and explained something or other incoherently.

The crisis passed: the pressing danger ended, he was all in a tremor; his thoughts were obfuscated by excitement, his nerves were a-shake. He was physically exhausted for the moment.

"It's all right; it's all right," he said, shivering and breathing hurriedly.

"Yes, yes! Aunt Maria must know——"

"He's been busy making plans——"

"What are his losses? Egad, it's a confounded earthquake. The stars are trembling. St Paul's will go next."

They were all speaking together, in a medley of satisfaction and disquietude.

"It will be all right; father will pull through. You see!"

"Pull through! I should think so! I always said he would! Confound all croakers!"

"Aunt Maria is certain to have some useful suggestions to make," counselled Elizabeth, as she rubbed her lips with a thimble finger. "She has an intellect of crystal, and a heart of gold."

"My feet!" cried Hugh, suddenly remembering. "I must get my boots."

"Jehu! What did you take them off for? I never saw such a chap—since my young days!"

"They are in the garden!" Hugh felt the futility of his explanation.

"In the garden! Good gracious. Some sort of cold-air cure. What?"

"I—oh, I—but now it's all right!"

"All right's the word!" cried the Major heartily. "And a jolly good job too. But, egad, you're something incoherent. As the Duke said to me, 'Plain talk is the best talk, after all!'"

"Aunt Maria will be very relieved," Cousin Elizabeth at last managed to assure them. "There is not one anxiety in our Family that is not shared by her."

Hugh begged them to wait in the dining-room, while he went to meet Travers, who was bringing the boots.

They did as he desired, and listened breathlessly to Betty as she passed with a clattering tray. The literary lady, her night of vigil ended, was now a victim to nerves. They spoke not a word until the library-door was closed on her.

"Aunt Maria is horribly, horribly distressed by all this," said Elizabeth, with some distractedness.

"Aunt Maria——" cried the Major, and then paused.

There were, for the moment, now that their

poignant anxiety had vanished, gleams of old battle in the warrior's eyes; then, with a fine magnanimity and effort of restraint, he won victory over himself.

"Hem!" he was content to say. "Ahem!"

Betty came hurrying in, her face alight with joy and thankfulness. Past anxieties and doubts of the future were lost in the present relief and happiness.

"All's well! Hooray! Hullo, uncle! Father's eating a sandwich! Hughie's a barrister!"

"Wha-at?" cried he.

"Hughie's a barrister! Hughie's a learned gentleman!"

"Eureka! Glory! Kismet!" The Major was actually at a loss for language.

"Dear Cousin Hugh!" exclaimed Elizabeth, in her most exultant and forgiving manner. "This will, indeed, be cheering news to our ever-revered aunt. I must, I will write to her by the very next post. Travers can take the letter. This is news that must not wait."

Hugh entered the dining-room; and, with voices competing, they challenged him.

"Oh, thank you. Yes." His air was something superior. "I had good friends and good fortune," he was gracious enough to say. "I'd—I'd never have done it—I'm so easily idle—if I'd stayed at home. I certainly was a prig and a weakling. Yes! . . . You'll forgive me, won't you; but I must telephone to Saunders. I'm going to have a finger in the business pie."

He bustled out of the room; his looks and his pose were serious, responsible.

"An old soldier is proving right after all.—Aha!—As I said to the Duke, 'My dear Duke, there's a sort of experience which makes some men sometimes infallible in their judgments.' Ahem! aha! I always knew that Hugh—our Hugh—would knock the cokernut. They don't knock cokernuts in these dejected times. They slither and flop on skating-rinks, a beastly exercise! I was right. Aunt Sally is another institution tumbled into the dustbin. Rotten times! Rotten times! I was confident Hugh would break the tape. Aha! I've said so to your Aunt Harriet a hundred times, and that wonderful woman—I can say that for her—invariably agreed."

Mrs Arnold at that moment came quietly into the dining-room. When she saw her brother-in-law, who sprang up to greet her, she smiled a pale and watery welcome. The strain past, she was looking merely a frail shadow of herself.

"It is kind of you to come, Cromwell! Anthony's gone to sleep on the sofa. Where's our Hugh?"

"He was here a minute ago!" murmured Elizabeth, looking at the fireplace, as if he might be there.

"Where's our barrister boy, our bewigged surprise, our obstinate egoist with the cards up his sleeve all the time?" asked the Major, chortling in his joy. "Yoho, what a prophet I

have proved! Where should our Hugh be but minding his father's business. But you are looking a beautiful wreck, my love: you must go and lie down too, Catherine—Kate, my dear. Harriet will be here shortly. She'll look after you!"

"No, no, I can't lie down. I'm too relieved. It has been such an anxious time: I couldn't sleep if I tried. I must find Hugh."

He needed no finding: in he came, authority in his tread.

"You never can get through on the telephone when you particularly want to. It's too popular, that's what it is. Mother, you'll go and lie down!" There was no question of the air of command.

"No, dearest, I am all right."

"Cousin Elizabeth, please! Mother must lie down. She's had no sleep since yesterday. Will you be so good as to take her upstairs?"

Mrs Arnold went without another word. Her eyes, with all their tiredness, beamed adoration of this new lord and master. Elizabeth accompanied her. The Major put up his eyeglass to look at them.

"What now, my younger Anthony? As you seem the cock of the walk, have you any commands for me?" he asked with a snort.

"You're a brick, Uncle Crom! You'll stay to lunch, won't you, and amuse my father when he wakes? He's not to brood."

"Amuse him! I! The seriousest man who remembers pegtop trousers. When a man

comes to my years he waxes lugubrious, and sighs for the dear departed."

"You'll never be lugubrious, Uncle Crom. It's easy enough for you to amuse and interest him. Get his mind away from the worries. Challenge him to croquet, billiards, anything! I'm off to the telephone again. I must see Saunders and investigate. I'm going to look into everything."

"You! Jehu, the son of Josephus! You! What do you know of finance, of business, of the most intricate market in the world? Why I—even I—am a babe in such things."

Hugh met the challenge with absolute confidence.

"Of course, I know nothing: as does many a barrister when he accepts a brief; but he is trained to take and manage every opportunity sprung on him; and this — at last — is my opportunity. Forgive me, I am—I have been—a prig, I know. They've often said so, and it's true, true as truth. But, really, I must go. There's the paper. Sit, read, be comfy, Uncle. Good old Uncle Crom: and cheer up father! So long! You are a brick, uncle. You deserve to know—dukes!" With that last fling he was gone.

Young Hopeful was in high spirits. The anxiety past, his nerves again normal, had brought the reaction of excited happiness. The difficulties ahead were as the prospects of a football match, in which he was captain of the superior team.

Hugh sprang downstairs to the recess where was the telephone, and at last got into communication with Copthall Avenue. He was listening to the best business-voice of his father's bewildered chief clerk. They talked as well as they were allowed to do for twenty minutes.

"Excellent!" said Hugh, at the end of it. "If all's well, father and I will be with you at ten o'clock to-morrow. . . . Tell the clerks to try and get other jobs at once, will you? If we can take them on again, we'll do so; but it's all very uncertain. You have full power and authority to give them the best testimonials they deserve. . . . Yes, he's keeping up splendidly. He'll pull things round. Never say die, is his motto. . . . Keep your heart up, Saunders! We need you. . . . Never say die is the word."

"Patronage!" thought Saunders, hearing the cocksureness of voice, without seeing the expression of countenance. That's the worst of the telephone!

The Family lunched: a subdued gathering. Anthony remained asleep in the library. Mrs Arnold was on her bed upstairs, wakeful still; but resting, thinking of restoratives—amongst them a rum-omelette—for her husband; and, vaguely feeling a new and ever-increasing pride, as well as strange confidence, in Hugh.

It was good to have him home again. Her old languid love for her first-born had been quickened to reality by the past and present troubles. She was wishing he would let her go downstairs; but, under the spell of his commands

and her own physical weariness, she had not the strength to disobey.

Now and again Betty went upstairs to her, and finding her ever awake, comforted her by saying that Anthony was still happily sleeping.

So the hours—bearers of balm and bringers of peacefulness—drifted by.

Meanwhile, at the luncheon-table, plans were endlessly discussed; with no more effect than a helpful clearing of the atmosphere. That, however, brought one happy and momentous issue, for, before its course was ended, Elizabeth ventured to say—

“Dear Cousin Hugh, I—may I—suggest that you bring the—the—that baby here, while you are so very busy? It would do us all good to—I would look after him.”

She blushed and faltered; but meant it. Hugh was taken aback by the suggestion, coming, as it did, from her. The readiness of mind he had begun to feel faith in was quite unready then. So, too, were Betty and the Major—especially the Major.

“Even mice have wings,” was his comment, entirely incomprehensible to all but Betty, who, being literary, had some aptitude for metaphorical expression. There were moments of significant silence. A domestic revolution had been wrought.

“We must all do something in these days,” went on the winged mouse, in her voice of resolute duty, “I feel it is a part of the mission

laid upon me. Dear Aunt Maria has told me
_____”

“What? She told you to mind the baby?”

“Oh no, dear Cousin Major; but always to do what was particularly disagreeable, because just that might be most helpful to others. This duty will be—I may confess—particularly disagreeable to me, and I hope—” she added with more confidence and something of a beam of light in her brown eyes — “it will also be helpful.”

“It will be helpful! It’s awfully good of you,” answered Hugh with gratitude and sincerity, “awfully good. It will help greatly. I really was beginning to get a little—” and then, wisely, he held his peace. It would not do for the new Sir Oracle to confess to misgivings.

Once again, therefore, Douglas, the son of Daphne, entered the Dene. This time Mrs Cromwell-Smith—convoying a stalwart maid impressed that morning into the service—brought him. From the moment of his entry Cousin Elizabeth took charge of the adopted child. She had elected herself his particular custodian: it was part of her mission; it was disagreeable. No one should share the responsibility; so——.

Thus was taken the first step of a process through which Hugh was to be freed of the incubus he had willingly undertaken, and Elizabeth was to discover her true *métier*. The luck of the Quixotes had accompanied the young knight right through his adventure—

although he had not the Arnold lip. With such an experience as this, successfully undergone, he would find confidence enough to challenge and charge ogres, mountains, windmills, giants, or any other threat of terrors that might beset him. There is a divinity that shapes the ends of the splendidly foolish.

Some folk have all the luck ; prigs have more than their ample share of the bounty of the fairies ! There were shining clouds of bright dreams about Hugh's pillows on that night of his triumph. The troubles that still threatened the Family seemed merely as morning mists that dissolve at the first greeting and warmth of the sun.

The Arnolds were not the sort of folk to go under !

CHAPTER XXI

CURTAIN

SPACE at The Wildernesse, the new home of the Arnolds, was decidedly cramped; but thanks to bride's weather, and an adequate garden, the festivity of happy tears and wedding-cake had passed off comfortably. Hugh's marriage with Cecily had taken place that morning. The blessed couple were now on their way by motor-car—hired, for Travers had become but an occasional vague memory—to Folkestone, for the honeymoon.

Sir Anthony was radiant. Though looking several years older, thinner, somewhat bent, and with countenance much lined, he had resumed his position of superlative authority in the Family. Chanticleer was himself again—with plumage smooth. His white waistcoat seemed a little less evident and expansive; but still he posed by the mantelpiece in the wonted manner. The outside guests, all but Truby and Manners, who still insisted on ranging themselves as potential members of the Family, had gone; but the more intimate relatives had remained; and after the excite-

ment and outpourings of good wishes and champagne, were something a little subdued. They were gleaning the emotional aftermath, as Betty had put it, in one of her incomplete romances.

Cousin Elizabeth was seated at a desk in the corner, writing the daily letter to Aunt Maria. Douglas, his Cockney ugliness—he has yellow hair and an upturned nose—accentuated by the three-corner hat and white satin suit, his livery of bridal train-bearer, was wriggling on a stool beside her, building a house with wooden bricks. When now and then—to the indignation of the adjacent Tobias, uncomfortably wearing a wedding rosette—the child's inexpert structure came tumbling down, "Duggie, darling! Is that my boy?" Cousin Elizabeth would murmur, in terms of motherly solicitude and spoiling.

Alice, realising the luxury of bridesmaid attire, was in the garden, Truby attendant. Tom and Millicent were in the dining-room, laboriously dividing the last meringue. Tom was now something in the City. Clad in the latest fashion, his podginess was accentuated by tight-fitting garments. He daily sat on a high stool, and spent hours unwillingly in adding up columns of figures, invariably wrong. The others were in the drawing-room grouped about Anthony. He was the focus of their eyes, the shining centre of the situation.

"Well, it went off successfully," he remarked. His manner suggested, quite simply, that

himself was the best of the reasons for the success.

There was babble of agreement, and general comments on this guest's complexion or head-gear and that; on the clergyman's voice, the officiousness of the pew-opener, the vagaries of Roddy Brook, the best man; on the unexpected interest shown by local residents; on the organist's playing of the Lohengrin wedding-music, and the murder he made of Mendelssohn; on the fussiness of the policemen; on the cheer given by sundry school children to Sir Anthony and the bride; on the eccentricity of a certain man, whose suspicious behaviour was sufficiently explained by his confessing himself a reporter.

The Family were thoroughly enjoying their gala day, when the Major, whose irrepressibility had survived two more talkative years, brought their minds to thoughts which had generally been permitted to sleep.

"There is one thing forgotten by everybody," he declared; "by everybody but me and Hugh—a wonderful infant, our bridegroom! I always said so. Eh, Harriet; didn't we?"

The Major punched a voluminous cushion in a chair, and elegantly settled himself against it.

"What do you mean, Cromwell," Sir Anthony demanded. "I'm not aware that anything—anything which could augment the—ah—success of this auspicious occasion has been overlooked."

"Guess!"

There were appeals from this person and that against so crude a device as guess-work. The

Major, therefore, condescended in his own especial manner to explain.

"This is an anniversary." He played with the ribbon of his watch-guard, content to wait for his effect.

"Your ride with the Duke of Essex!" suggested Betty, archly. "If that glorious event is not, after all, apocryphal, Uncle Crom, like Mrs Gamp's Mrs 'Arris!"

"You are a baggage, Betty, my scribbling child! If you were not an accepted novelist—I fell asleep over *Lady Ermyntrode's Eyes* last night; didn't we, Harriet?—I'd——"

This was too daring for Mrs Cromwell-Smith's satisfaction.

"No, Cromwell! Don't tease her. She may be a genius. It is a beautiful book, Betty; better than any novel I've read for years. So-and-so and such-an-one (she mentioned certain novelists whose sales are so great that their simplest commas must be worth half-a-crown) could not have written it. The day is coming when——"

"I know the anniversary you refer to!" Anthony bluntly interrupted, something to the concern of Betty, who was not indifferent to incense of praise.

"Well, isn't it?"

"It is, Cromwell; it is; but I'm not—ah—eager to remember it!"

"Why not, Tony? The way you have rebuilt your fortunes after that catastrophe; egad, it is a tribute. It proves at anyrate that one old

soldier—who laments the passing of pipeclay—is a true prophet.”

The relatives opened ears, widened eyes, keen to gather the drift of these references.

“Is it really two years since—since—” began one of the cousins, with a temerity which fell to an abrupt conclusion.

Sir Anthony was not lacking in courage; and during the last two years had more than recovered his physical and moral strength. He looked at the lady of mild inquiry, and knitted his brows in thought.

“So it is! Two years to-day!” He turned to beam a glance at his wife who, as usual, was quietly watching. “Oh, that morning! If ever a man was amazed it was I. I have—ah—analysed causes. My—I shall not call it failure, for the composition we—Hugh and I, came to with our creditors was — ah — morally equal to twenty shillings in the pound; and the commercial house of Arnold is stable, stable! It was all due to the confounded Government. They had so depreciated securities—but I must not be technical. Tell me, how did you come to remember the anniversary, Cromwell?” Again was interest shifted to the Major: even Cousin Elizabeth, who had just completed a glowing and much under-lined tribute to the good-behaviour in the church of her adopted son, paused from writing in order to listen and say:

“The dear Major has a better memory than I.—No, darling, no! Cats’ tails are not for

deary boys to play with. Tobias will scratch. Cruel Tobias!"

Douglas looked at Tobias with a vicious infantile eye; and wisely decided to resume the rôle of Balbus.

"As I was walking to the church from the station—Augustus Davyss was with me, the feller doesn't know how to wear a monocle, by George; but he means well—we passed the Dene. The place looks different—the vulgarised ghost of itself. There were Venetian blinds—Venetian blinds—in the drawing-room windows. Goths! I believe the wife wears a wig. Dash it, I do! Suddenly it occurred to me, it was such a day as this. I took out my pocket-book. I put two and two together. Davyss remembered nothing. It was the very identical day. Two years ago! I thought it was three years—time's a dooce of a practical joker; he's no innocent eld, not he!—but Hugh corrected me."

"How? When?" he was asked.

"Just before his speech. He fixed this day on purpose. Isn't that like him? He simply doats on anniversaries and coincidences. What a power he has—so managing! He'll make a good barrister. What a speech that was! Not a spark of emotion in it; just plain words, exact words. No metaphor, no images, just business-like lawyer-talk! I believe that for two pins he'd have called you m'lud, Tony! I'll bet a corkscrew to a dead mouse he'd got it on the tip of his tongue; but no, the future

Attorney-General had too good control of himself. That feller has changed!"

"It was an admirable speech," Anthony granted, "full of a careful modesty. We are proud of our son. His mother and I——"

"He's a wonderful boy." The Major was always enthusiastic on this subject. He had grateful memories of his own kindness in the days of the wandering. "We, too, are proud of him; aren't we, Harriet?"

"We ought to be!"

Sir Anthony hemmed, played with his watch-chain, pulled at his waistcoat. He settled the golden tie-ring, twirled his pince-nez; signs of potential eloquence demanding expression.

"Yes, yes; we are proud of him; proud. When he has his first brief; it is high time—I must say it—that he had his first brief; but this devilling—ah, excuse the expression, Elizabeth; it is merely technical."

"Oh, don't mind me!" she thrilled. The grey mouse was quite transformed. There was little now of the old apologetic meekness. "I'm sure it is meant to be humorous. Such words are, I have been told. But for the sake of this little boy, our little Duggy—hush, loveydear, hush! Nunkynunkie's talky-talking!—it would, I think, be better that such expressions should not be used. I am sure our Aunt Maria would be distressed to hear them, however technical they might seem."

The Major could not suppress a grunt, developed into a diplomatic spasm of coughing.

"This—ah—under-practice with M'Andrewes will be good for Hugh. Although clients are not available yet, he is often consulted for voluntary advice. I see the shadow of a judge's wig on his brow." Anthony was so enchanted by his figure of speech that he needs must pause the better to apprehend it.

"I always said he was an egg of the first water," declared Aunt Harriet. "He studied; he studied."

Members of the Family hastened to agree as well as they were able. Hugh was much in fashion and favour within the Circle, in these, his wreathéd days.

"He is firm. He has iron in his blood," said Aunt Emily.

Again Sir Anthony hemmed. He did not intend to lose their attention. They hushed in sympathy at the sound.

"It is time for me to say—I am entitled to say it—and this is the appropriate moment, that his mother and I did a wise thing, the right thing, when we let him go out into the world."

The Major, at these words, opened his mouth to gasp; but his wife caught his eye, and he was able to suppress even the interjectional expression of his thoughts.

"We had some talk about it, he and I—his mother was there too. It was in the library of the old house. We were just a little nervous—weren't we, mother?—at the idea of our son and heir—carefully guarded as he had

been — going to fend entirely for himself in the world ; but we did not hesitate or doubt him ! ”

Mrs Arnold made no reply. She looked with affection at her husband.

“ We sent that boy into the world. We said to him, ‘ Hugh, your father had to fight for his livelihood. Your father’s father ; there he is ’ ” — Anthony pointed proudly to the portrait of his severe, unbending parent, calmly gazing from the wall on that day’s domestic doings — “ ‘ had a rougher, tougher time, even, than I had. Go ; go ; we trust you,’ we said to Hugh. That was our attitude, if not our exact words ; wasn’t it, mother ? There was some difficulty, even friction ; I admit it. Our eagerness and Hugh’s—he was willing enough, I’m proud to say—were not quite the same ; but we—ah—persisted. It was that year or so of arduous experience which made Hugh. It fitted him for the work he had to do in co-operation with me ; and so we—he and I—won our fight. We re-established—no, augmented—the position of our commercial house ; and though we now live in—ah—more restricted circumstances, than at the Dene—we miss the library, it was a useful room — we have flourished, we have flourished ! ”

The Family had listened entranced. Anthony’s explanation had cleared up some unsatisfied difficulties. Now they understood better the true situation, and his splendid magnanimity. It was an hour of personal triumph to him.

His simple statement had appealed to them.

"And everything," he exclaimed energetically—he half turned to slap the mantelpiece with his hand—"everything has worked out well: everything! Even that child—" bravely he pointed an oratorical finger at Douglas, who, for the sixteenth or eighteenth time, was recreating a mimic Babel.

"Bless his ducky heart!" cried the devoted Elizabeth.

"Hugh was right there too. Yes; on that point we—ah—vehemently disagreed with him; but, I acknowledge it." The Family were dazzled by this nobleness. "He has proved right; though it was really thanks to Cousin Elizabeth. I cannot think otherwise that his—ah—quixotic act would have justified itself. Her womanly heart, her ennobled sense of duty, her——"

"Oh no, dear Cousin," she protested, blushing painfully. "I don't know what I'd do without this pet. He's a blessing to me, to all of us. Mother's boy!" she doated.

Tobias, as if in contempt of the over-praising of the unpleasant infant, raised himself leisurely, stretched an arched back, with stateliness stalked away.

At that moment it occurred to Mrs Arnold that a little music would be the proper thing. So she looked about her for Alice. Alice was not present. Where was Alice?

"What is it, my darling?" her husband inquired. He was much in love with and

attentive to his wife on this happy hymeneal day.

"I thought it would be nice if Alice played us something; something appropriate to the occasion."

She looked once more about the room to make sure her eldest daughter was not there, somewhere.

"An excellent idea." He beamed at her. All in the room beamed at her in sympathy. "Really, Catherine, my love, your suggestions always——"

Aposiopesis once more; admirable, effective. The broken sentence suggested a ream of compliment, a weight of wisdom.

This general exchange of sympathy was abruptly interrupted by one of the cousins—Aminta, the emotional and romantic, it was—declaring:

"This would not be the right moment." She spoke with an arch significance.

"Why not? why not?" fussed Sir Anthony, apt as ever to become Chanticleer on the slightest provocation. He could not bear to be played with, and the faintest suspicion of such a sacrilege would arouse him.

Cousin Aminta smiled at them. Her eyes held humorous meaning. Her arch manner titillated their interest. For the moment she shone, even more than was suggested by the glistening dowdiness of her apparel. She had news to give. That was evident. She was aware of something that would interest and perhaps surprise them.

Anthony was becoming impatient; but he restrained its expression. He disliked having his curiosity quickened and not immediately satisfied.

"Come, fair lady!" cried the Major. "Why not? we ask, why not?"

Aminta, rustling, rose. While her eyes had been watching the garden, her ears had been intent on the conversation within the room. She had enjoyed a happy duality of entertainment.

Putting finger to lips, she made a mock whisper, so that all could hear.

"I think—I think——"

"Yes?" The monosyllable that spurred her was stern.

"That Alice is being proposed to—by Mr Truby!"

"Never!" cried Anthony, who alone in that gathering could possibly be surprised by such development. He was never prepared for the expected.

"I hope it is true!" said Mrs Arnold, simply.

"Darling!" murmured Aunt Harriet to the mother, clasping her hand.

"I've been expecting it for years," said Betty, bluntly.

Mr Manners, who had been seated beside her, drew just a little closer to her. The sharp eyes of one or two witnessed the incident, and drew conclusions accordingly.

It was evident to all that the crucial moment in Alice's life had come. Sir Anthony, his wife,

and the others present on that sacred occasion, drifted to, and were peering through the windows. There was no effort of rush; no sign of curiosity that might be called vulgar. It was all rigorously proper and aboveboard; but, still, there was an unquestionable show of real staring interest. No doubt about that! Seventeen faces peered frankly through the curtained windows which looked on the garden.

Alice was sitting upright in a chair. Being practised in the gentle art of languorous lounging, she did not sit upright even, unless very personally interested. Truby, his hat off, his smooth hair reflecting the sunshine, was on his knees beside her, talking earnestly, waving a white hand. Alice was gazing on him with something of a business-like regard.

Aminta's statement was just. There was no mistaking appearances. Alice was being proposed to. The day and the occasion had brought Mr Truby to his destiny.

"Pom: pom: pom, pom, pom: pom, pom!" hummed the Major. The opening phrase of Mendelssohn's Wedding March brought tears of dear sentiment—the expression of her gentle thoughts—to Mrs Arnold's eyes. She was now to lose a daughter.

"I must open my letter, and add an important postscript," said Cousin Elizabeth, thoughtfully, and with some appearance of Family rapture.

At that moment, once again, crash and crumble went Duggie's constructed house. He

alone had been intent on his own business, while the comedy of life—its million billionth performance since first enacted in the Garden of Eden—was performed in the green little garden of the Wildernesse.

“It is evident that, as Aminta declared, this is not the moment to ask Alice to play. I hope, we all hope, she may be happy!”

“Hear, hear! hear, hear!” agreed Major Cromwell-Smith.

“She has been the perfect daughter,” Sir Anthony said, as he turned to his wife, whose face was an April picture of happiness and regret.

“She has! And Betty too,” was Mrs Arnold’s fond answer.

“Oh, rot, mum!” cried Betty. “I mean about me!”

“We must have some entertainment,” said Sir Anthony decisively, again brushing the conversation away from his second daughter’s qualities, though at once he was going to make more than adequate amends; “now that we—so many members of the Family—are gathered together. As Alice—ah—is otherwise engaged—hum, rather good that!—you must amuse us, Betty, in her stead.”

“I’m no use—” she began in her energetic voice. She was properly modest about her musical qualities.

“Why can’t you read to us, my dear?” Aunt Harriet asked. “Read something of whatever you are now writing.”

Betty blushed, hesitated, beamed with pleasure. This was glorious. It almost took away her breath. A little more, and it would have been too much.

"Would you really like? Would you really?" she asked, with anxiety. To be discouraged now, would be too dreadful, quite.

There was a chorus of agreement, generally sincere. This idea of the reading of some original work was new and promising.

"Let me fetch it for you," Mr Manners ventured to volunteer.

Betty was so flattered and bewildered, so excited and deliciously flurried, that she forgot what she was saying.

"Oh, would you, dear?" she asked. Pat and unmistakable out came the affectionate expression.

Every one present laughed. The circumstance was unavoidable.

"Oh, oh!" cried Betty, red as fury, and biting her lips; she was very inclined to weep with rage.

"It is all right, Betty!" murmured Aunt Harriet consolingly. "There is nothing to be ashamed of. I called your uncle many absurd things before we were married."

"Do go and get it—dear!" boomed that uncle with characteristic mischievousness.

Manners rose, glared at the Major, pulled at his cuffs to set them properly, glanced down at his general appearance to find it right; and stalked from the room.

"In the top drawer of the bureau in the

morning-room," Betty advised him, as he was on his way. She had recovered her tone. "I'm not ashamed to say I'm fond of Percy," she boldly asserted. "He is very unselfish and not a mischief-maker, Uncle Crom!"

"He's a good fellow!" declared Sir Anthony. "If you and he, and Alice and Truby——"

"Mr Truby's Christian name is Cecil," said Aunt Harriet.

"He is really and truly a jolly good fellow!" the Major hurried to say.

There were flutters of agreement from all parts, with more open gazing into the garden, where Mr Truby was now to be seen unobtrusively—but, from the drawing-room windows, quite evidently—holding Alice's hand. Again the Major began to hum his marriage-march, to be suddenly hushed as Mr Manners entered, bearing a packet of manuscript, daintily tied with blue ribbon. He glared anew at the Major, who sighed deeply with too-obvious penitence; and then handed it, with reverence, to Betty, who with ardent eyes, and smiling, showed her thanks.

"Chair, Chair!" cried the Major.

"Hush!" said Aminta's crony, Cousin Ermyltrude, who had been a serious baby, and was destined to be forever a serious maiden-dame.

"Anthony wants a seat."

"No, no!" he protested vigorously, shaking his head. Standing it was easier to escape. He confessed to not being literary, although

he was very glad that Betty should entertain them and shine.

"Can you see, Betty darling?"

"Yes, thank you, Auntie." She arranged the manuscript on her knee, and rested her cheek on her left hand, one finger pointing upwards. "Shall I begin now? Are you—are you ready?" Douglas chose that very moment to cause his construction once more to fall tumbling.

Sir Anthony rang the bell. Cousin Elizabeth looked with distressed eyes first at the child and then at the head of the household.

A maid appeared.

"It is time he slept!" Anthony pointed at the child with a gesture worthy of the Great Protector ordering the removal of the bauble.

Words of protest sprang to Elizabeth's lips; but were unspoken. She did not dare to oppose or offend Anthony, and so, though Douglas howled in protest, and with puny fist punched the hip of the servant, he was led and dragged away.

"The title is not yet decided!" Betty brought their thoughts back to the intellectual world.

"No matter! It will amuse us—egad—to guess what it should be. *Little Poppets*; or, *The Girl with the Crimson Crinoline*."

"Be serious, Cromwell!" frowned his wife. He realised she meant what she said and was mum. He laid a mocking finger over his mouth.

"Uncle Crom, if you do not behave—" Betty began; but was afraid to say exactly

what she threatened, which was not to read any of her book.

Again Manners glared. He had once confessed heartily to liking this old boy; but now he was inclined to think him an arrogant, feather-minded, reckless, tongue-rambling, militant, old beast—or words to that effect.

The reading began. The Family settled itself to attention. Those nearest to the window continued to take an interest in the garden with its placid love-scene, which still seemed rather in its conversational stages.

“I look from the window; and, reader, what do I see? A man walks over the daisy-dappled lawn. He has the form of a Greek god. Every inch of his six-foot four is energetic. Power and perfect gracefulness speak in his limbs. Blue eyes flash from beneath a brain-burdened brow. His nose is aquiline. His mouth is the colour of a red cherry, and when he smiles—he is seldom solemn—the parted lips disclose teeth perfect in shape and white as maidens’ souls. A slender moustache, with naturally pointed ends, graces his upper lip. His chin is cleft. In his right cheek is a dimple. His hair is of gold, so closely cut that the crisp curls are almost clipped away. My heart tells me who it is. Captain Raoul Dalrymple, V.C., D.S.O., the champion cricketer, swimmer, oarsman, shot, golfer, and dancer of the county.

“I turn from the window with embarrassment. My eyes are caught by a girl’s face in the mirror. The woe-kissed hazel eyes shine with a new

light. The oval face wreathed with chestnut tresses—but hush my gossip pen! My cheeks burn. Who is that beauty—yes, that beauty there portrayed? Reader, it is I! Priscilla Drelincourt. The heart in my bosom throbs. Priscilla Drelincourt, whose fathers fought in the Crusades and girded swords with the Conqueror, loves. She loves. Priscilla loves. Ah me!——”

At that moment interruption happened once again. The maid entered with a telegram.

“What is it, what is it? asked Anthony fussily, pompously, waving his hands.

“A telegram, sir!”

She passed the tray to Elizabeth.

From Hugh to say they had safely arrived was, of course, the first idea; but he would not have telegraphed to Elizabeth? A wedding message belated; but that also would hardly have been sent to her.

Mrs Arnold, as always at sight of a telegram, began to feel painful suspense and was all of a flutter.

Cousin Elizabeth opened the envelope, read, stared, was startled.

“What is it? Good news? Bad news? What?” they asked. “Who is it from?”

She looked at them with eyes of boding. Her little being quavered. Her voice shook.

“Our Aunt Maria——” She needs must pause. A wave of deep emotion silenced her.

She was encouraged to proceed. Their voices were very kind.

“Our Aunt Maria—has—passed away!”

There was a momentary interval of deep silence.

“Absolutely impossible!” said the Major, finally.

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